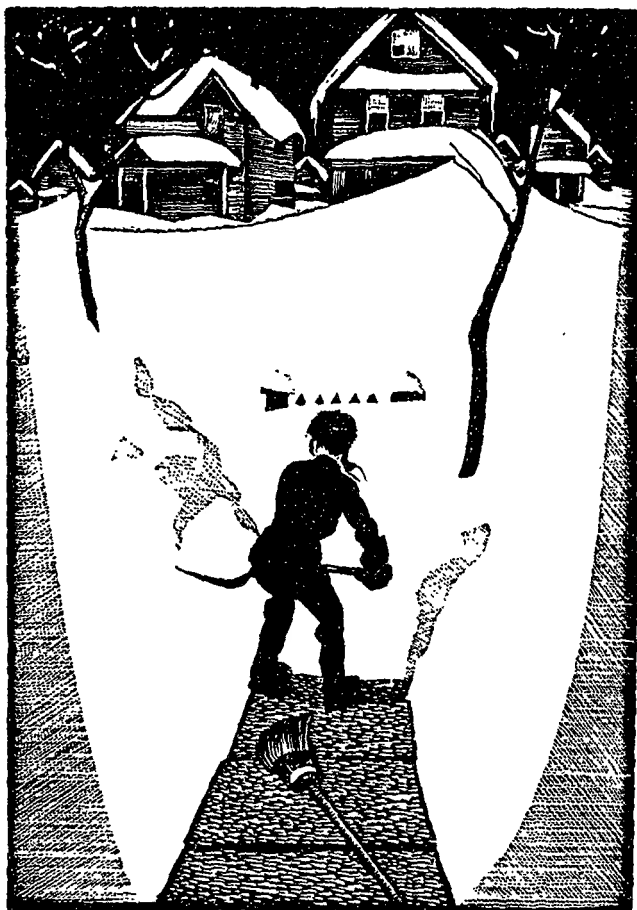




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THE FIRST WINTER



W. J. Phillips, R.C.A.

AFTER THE BLIZZARD

1405

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THE FIRST WINTER

A Canadian Chronicle

by

H. G. G. HERKLOTS

Canon of St. John's Cathedral, Winnipeg, and
Professor in St. John's College

LONDON

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TO
ALL 'THOSE FRIENDS
IN ENGLAND
TO WHOM
I OWE LETTERS

‘Of course, the first winter you don’t feel it.’—

WESTERN CANADIAN SAYING.

PREFACE

THIS preface is intended to be what critics call 'disarming.' Few claims can be made for this book. It is not an account of pioneer life in Canada by one who has broken in his own homestead in the West—for its author can neither milk a cow nor plough a furrow. Nor is it a rapid survey of Canadian life by an intelligent English visitor who has stayed in hotels from Halifax to Vancouver. It is rather a casual commentary on a first winter in Canada by one who was called to church and college work in a western city, whose work gave him certain opportunities of seeing the life of settlers in the bush and on the prairie during the long cold months.

The book began as a diary. I read bits aloud to Canadian friends, and they bade me continue. They seemed to think it was funny. I read bits aloud to fellow-Englishmen, who were settlers along with me, and they bade me have it printed. They said that it would save them having to write letters home. And that

remark indicates what this book really is. It is a long letter home. Even at the opening of the fifth winter, and for the father of two budding Canadian citizens—one of whom speaks the local argot to perfection—England is still home. It is not yet the Old Country.

Perhaps many things would be differently expressed were I to write on the Canadian scene to-day. Many things have happened in the West since the beginning of this decade. When I first began to write this book I had never heard of a 'dried-out area.' Yet I do not think that there is anything in it that I ought to suppress or to change. I may have been a very ignorant and trying immigrant. The reader must judge for himself. But I hope that I have not wholly lost the eager interest in all things Canadian that I felt when these pages were first written, and I know that, despite all prophecies to the contrary, my blood has not yet grown thin. And all the time I am learning to find new beauty in the wide, spreading plain and in the great expanse of the sky above the prairie. They are very foolish who declare that Westerners have no background. If they but turn to the country that lies about them, they will find that it is a masterpiece conceived on the grandest scale.

From its contemplation a great literature might be made.

It only remains for me to thank the editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press* for permission to reprint two of the shortest chapters that follow.

H. G. G. H.

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FIRE DOWN BELOW

VERY often during the day, now that the frost has come, I hear sounds as of footsteps on the veranda. Surely that is the postman? No, it cannot be; he comes but twice a day and brings but little when he comes. An unemployed workman, perhaps, seeking to earn the price of a night's lodging by sweeping away the snow from the pathway or throwing the birch logs from the pile behind the house into the depths of the coal cellar? A man with something to sell—a Christmas tree or an insurance policy, a pair of bootlaces or a vacuum cleaner? A boy with eggs from the country, or the magazine called *Liberty*? There is no sound of knocker or of bell, but the footsteps still continue. I get up from desk or fire-place and open both the doors. There is no one there, nor has any man left a circular behind to mark his passing. It has only been the frost at play; the planks of the veranda chattering nervously to themselves as a man's teeth chatter when the wind blows coldly.

All around the house there is snow, and more comes constantly in small showers at night. Yet there is not so much snow as there was. The snow came suddenly upon us in late November. It came with a rush, and it may well have come from the North Pole. It was piled high in the streets, in drifts far more than knee-deep. Out in the country the telegraph-poles were down for miles. Even in the city the electric light was temporarily disorganized so that a few students became for awhile medieval scholars learning Hebrew by candlelight. Men trod snow, breathed snow, talked snow, swept snow—and I, for one, lodged a bottle of ginger-ale securely in a snow-drift to cool it well for supper. But now the snow has become accepted. We do not think of it; it is there and it will be there till April, that is all we know. It is accepted and it is mostly compressed. It is caked upon the roadways, and there are hard, beaten ways—I have beaten one myself—across the vacant lots. Most of us obey the grandmotherly injunction never to stray from the beaten track. For elsewhere the snow still is treacherous. The trouble is not so much its depth as its uncertainty. It never settles in one place for long; it is always on the go. What is shallow one

day may be deep the next. When the wind lifts the snow goes flying. It jumps and starts and rushes ahead as an aeroplane taxis before it leaves the ground. Best to obey the advice of your grandmother and keep to the beaten track.

It is the pride of the dwellers in those damp islands that lie to the north of France, that while other lands have climate they alone have weather. Like most causes for national pride it is a false one. Most lands have weather, but it needs sometimes the practised eye of the old inhabitant to discern its subtle changes. I suppose that even in the Sahara, where sweltering day succeeds to sweltering day, there are subtleties of heat that give the confirmed desert-goer conversational openings and, if he is an epistolary fellow and no mere unlettered sheik, something to write home about. So in the West do we freeze, but, in early winter at least, we freeze each day with a difference. Winter itself did not come suddenly upon us. It came with pageantry. An overture was played before the show began. First there were cold, clear nights, when the aurora borealis was a white wonder in the sky. Tomato plants and cauliflowers were suddenly oppressed, though many a hardier beetroot still

survived. Then winter fled and autumn for awhile returned, gay autumn that was soft as an English spring. There followed the first snows, light, damp affairs such as come in February to London; as if the actress earth had given her face a preliminary powder before the solid make-up that was to follow. The snow melted and we had slush. Then the slush froze. Every tree became a shivering mass of ice; the poplar bush beyond the city was a fairyland. And it was the weight of this ice that brought the telegraph-poles toppling down. Since then blizzards have scourged our streets. At halts on the street car (*anglice*, tram), when the traffic signals jumped suddenly to red, the conductor could be seen hurriedly loading a miniature furnace with miniature coals. Groceries were brought to the door by sleigh. One morning a collar of ice had lifted high above the bottle the cardboard lid that sought to restrain our errant milk. But the temperature has not remained constant. It has been like the temperature of a sick man undergoing a series of crises; it would be so mapped on a chart. Nor can any man tell me what it will do next.

Exaggeration is half-way to poetry, and it is always the practice of those who love their

weather to exaggerate. An Englishman will tell you that it is the dirtiest, messiest weather he has known for years, meanwhile lauding the good old days when summer really was summer, when in winter they roasted oxen whole upon the Thames. The Londoner has so exaggerated his fogs that not a few foreigners believe him to be a dweller in perpetual night. (On a foggy evening in Manitoba I have been rung up by a kindly neighbour to ask whether I didn't find the weather homelike.) The Winnipegger—for such is his unlovely but self-chosen name—glances at his morning's newspaper to observe that the temperature at midnight was two degrees below zero, yet cheerfully agrees with his neighbour who calls out to him that 'it's twenty below this morning!' There are some men for whom it is never cold without also being twenty below. The unsuspecting immigrant is told fantastic tales of fifty and even sixty degrees below zero. I have heard that some coal merchants have a little habit of presenting to their regular customers thermometers to fix to the outside walls of their houses. Such instruments might well have an inherent tendency to exaggeration.

The seasons form the framework of our life, but they are also the enemy. We seem always

to be either taking windows off or putting them on. In the summer we have extra windows of gauze to keep out the flies. In the winter we have extra windows of glass, and extra doors as well, to keep out the cold. It was not long before a knock at the door came to remind us that we really ought to do something about the storm windows.

We had not forgotten about them. But in truth we had tried to forget. When I saw a neighbour perilously perched upon a ladder, I looked the other way. Putting on the storm windows—some Canadian Keats should make it the subject of an ode. For it is the principal mark of the season's change. We were to learn that neither snowdrops in the garden nor daffodils in the fields would mark our spring: we might notice the crocuses on the prairie or hear the crunch of ice beneath the bridge, but the main thing would be that we should take off the storm windows and see with the sudden clarity of a man who has had an operation for cataract. Autumn in milder lands may slip damply into winter, but when the ladder stands against his house the Winnipegger knows full well that hibernation has begun. He knows that till long past Easter the air of the outer world will only enter his dwelling-

place through the three small holes that pierce the outer window's framing or the puny pane that slides aside like the lid of a child's pencil-box. And of course there will be draughts that come from nowhere.

Still we tried to protest, as hardy voyagers dispute the steward's ruling that the port-hole must be closed. It was no use. They were the only men who really knew our windows—and I gathered that they took some knowing—and in two days' time they would be haled away for a fortnight's *corvée* at the Grasmere Ditch. (By what strange irony of fate had the loveliest of English lakes, by whose side Wordsworth walked with Dorothy, given its name to a ditch? Even a ditch spelt with a capital 'D'?) So all day long they were at work. Over all our movements they gained something of an ape's-eye view. They peered down through the small side window into the dining-room, and as I wrote at my desk one of them stood on a ladder, hardly more than a yard away, wondering, it may be, what I was scribbling, omniscient as Zeus and speechless as the Sphinx. But at last the work was done. We are now (almost) hermetically sealed.

Storm windows are only one of the weapons with which we defeat the enemy. Fur coats

are brought out from moth bags; fur caps, too—every Old Timer will tell you that his is at least twenty years old. There are overshoes of every description, and there are furnaces in the basement of almost every house. When talk of snow has abated, men begin to talk of fuel. And they continue to talk of it right through the winter, referring to it casually even, in moments of anticipation and recollection, on summer evenings by the lake side. What do you burn? What do you burn? It is the great, the all-engrossing question. In November especially does the whole city enter a phase of fuel-mindedness. The coal merchants bombard you with circulars. One offered to clean my chimney for nothing if I would buy his coals. None but a certified chimney-sweep would be sent to do the job. Another offered bags of wood with every ton of coal. A third—in December—made a similar offer of a Christmas tree. But every householder becomes an unpaid advertiser of his particular brand. Far away in England I had imagined that there could be no romance in this business of steam heating and hot-water heating and heating with hot air. I had thought it a mechanical and soulless business. Never was I more certainly mistaken. As each man has his own

tobacco and hesitates to smoke another, so has each man his own coal—though some there are, poor dilettanti of the furnace, who flit from fuel to fuel, never wholly satisfied, always hoping for a best that is yet to be. Men savour the names of coal as some men savour the names of wine. Drumheller there is from Alberta, Galt and Macleod River (half-brother, I am told, to anthracite), Cannel coal and Pocahontas from the States, Newcastle coal that never saw the Tyne, inexpensive Souris, the poor man's coal, that looks like solid mud, Foothills to remind one that not all the land is prairie. There is coke for such as like it, and the confirmed coker will argue till dawn in defence of his position. Finally there are scientific briquettes, modern and up to date, so tempting to one who may have learnt to keep his hands from picking and stealing yet with difficulty restrains himself from throwing stray missiles at dogs, at sparrows, or at cats. It would never do for me to buy these briquettes. I should throw my fires away.

At night sometimes, when the temperature really is below zero, the chimney smoke pours thickly from the houses of the street. The fuel fancier stands back to watch it (pulling his fur collar around him as he does so). 'That

house is burning hard coal and that one coke,' he says. 'I fancy they've got Souris over there.' All this and more he can deduce from the ash-piles staining the snow behind each house. In this land there is very little privacy.

Although the country is comparatively a new one, or perhaps for this very reason, the greatest praise a man can achieve in it is to be called an Old Timer. New countries are often more traditional than old. The Old Timer is like a sixth-form boy. He was there before any one else. He was there, it may be, at the very beginning of things, turning the first furrow or opening the first store. In a sense the country is his country, for he has made it. The immigrant may be welcome, but he is none the less an upstart—rather a new boy—and it is very natural to wonder whether he possesses all those sterling qualities that have made the British Empire what she is to-day. Nevertheless we are all Old Timers in the making. In one or two things I am an Old Timer already. I had reached the city before they started monkeying with the street-car fares. And it may be that I shall one day recall with horror—or with sentimental affection—the days when men still stoked their furnaces, when Pocahontas was a name with

which to conjure. Changes are in the air. Already the city itself, and a private company or two, have begun to supply heat in asbestos-covered pipes to those who live or labour in one or two restricted areas. Men turn on taps and keep their offices and houses evenly heated at the vile heat they prefer. Seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit, it sometimes is, with hardly a window that will open—the mind of an Englishman reels at the thought of such a fug. But then, his blood has not yet gone thin. There is talk of extending the system. Indeed there is more than talk. We have had a local referendum about it. I have in the past attended many lectures on the referendum, spoken in debates on the referendum, bought and read (for examination purposes) St. Loe Strachey's book on the referendum. But when at last the opportunity came for me to cast my vote in a referendum on central heating I failed to do so. Which, as they say, only goes to show. I had half a mind, out of sheer cussedness and because of the posters that bade me support the project, to vote against it. Actually it was carried by a great majority. My solitary vote—for Pocahontas and the good old times—would have been of no avail.

At winter's first approach every man and a

good half of the women whom I met gave me advice about the furnace. When you 're lighting it, they said, give us a ring and we 'll come round to help you. It crossed my mind to give notice in the local paper of a 'Basement At Home' to which all friends and advisers would be invited. Bring your own shovel. Potatoes to be roasted on the first red coals. In the end I lit the thing surreptitiously, with only some very casual advice from the man who was rigging-up the storm windows. And I feel that by now it may well be said that I have been initiated into the mystery of stoking. I have learnt so to fling the coal through the little furnace door that it makes no mess upon the basement floor, and *spreads* as it falls within. I am a master of checks and draughts; I know the purpose of the slicer door. I do not know how I should fare with coke—for which men serve a special term of apprenticeship—but with coal I am moderately safe. The way, indeed, has been marred with accidents. I have acquired my knowledge by experience rather than from advice. Once I thought that there was thunder in the heavens, but it was the expansion-tank that was busily boiling over. One morning I awoke to hear rattling sounds above me, then to discover that water was

streaming through the ceiling into the room. The plumber knows his way to the house, and we have pencilled a large cross to mark his name in the telephone book. But now all burns smoothly. At stated intervals I stoke and regulate the draught. To be a satisfactory stoker is already to be half a Canadian.

Nor is it coal alone we burn. Many acres of Winnipeg's great sprawling area are filled all the year with high stacks of wood; many square miles of bush and forest must be burnt in our houses each winter. You may still come across a church or public building even that is heated with logs alone. Very soon the splutter and whine of the sawing machine was heard from many a neighbouring garden plot. And for us wood fires made all the difference. For when all is said and done, neither steam heat nor hot water nor any mock contrivance of electric radiation is ultimately satisfying. You cannot poke or prod these things. You cannot sit around a radiator nor roast chestnuts upon the uprush of hot air in the hall. They will not consume the orange-peel cast at them, they can do nothing with a walnut shell. Who built the good brick fire-place in our front room I do not know. But I bless him continually. With a good fire burning, we are

not obliged to overheat the remainder of our house. We can even allow the attic radiator to get frozen stiff. For I like a chilly bedroom. And it was an American writer—perhaps America's greatest writer—who wrote in *Moby Dick*: 'The height of this sort of deliciousness is to have nothing but the blanket between you and your snugness and the cold of the outer air. Then there you lie like the one warm spark in the heart of an Arctic crystal.'

It is customary in this land to imagine that an Englishman is by his very nature incompetent. He is held guilty until he has proved himself to be innocent. He may be able to preach a sermon, write a book, give a lecture, but he is not expected to be able to stoke a furnace, cook a chop, wield an axe, or hammer a nail straight into a piece of wood. When I was suddenly seen in the back garden holding an axe, the neighbours trembled. Some suggested even that I should stand in a sugar-box before I ventured to hold that horrid thing above my head. I would chop a finger off, or perhaps a foot. Little use for me to say that swinging an axe, an accomplishment acquired, though not indeed very skilfully, while doing war work as a boy, has long been one of my

favourite pastimes. I have been told often enough that there is no wood in England. Nevertheless I went on chopping, and my toes are still intact.

At first the wood I bought was tamarack, for the sake of its good-sounding Indian name. Others burnt poplar, the commonest of our trees, and yet others slabs, the bark-edged trimmings of timber, like the crusts cut from sandwiches before they are fit to appear at afternoon tea. I found that the tamarack burnt merrily and quickly, like the cedar they were burning last winter at my home in Dorset. But the splinters get into your hands when you are chopping it, and tamarack is, after all, but a high-sounding name for larch. So I was converted and became a birch burner. Its bark is the best kindling that I know, and when burnt has a smell suggestive of incense. So we live in a perpetual odour of sanctity.

More electricity is used in Winnipeg per head of the population than in any other city of the world. That is one of our records, of which we are not unnaturally proud. For in the world of material things electricity spells progress and comfort. It is very convenient to cook on an electric stove—though it takes an unconscionable time to boil a kettle on one.

It is very convenient in summer-time to have hot water always in the tap by reason of a small electric boiler in the basement. It is very convenient, though it is also a little trying, to read all the wayside hoardings by night as well as by day. But while electricity brings convenience it brings also a deal of social uniformity. In our streets at Christmas, in many shops, in innumerable houses, there are Christmas trees. Yet each one is illuminated with the same kind of coloured electric lights. One tree differs not from another tree in glory.

We were determined to be different. We did not even buy our decorations at the tencent store, but made again the paper chains of our childhood from coloured wrapping-papers carefully set aside. One of these chains especially pleased me. It was made from violet wrapping-paper, the unprinted narrow edge of *P.E.N. News* sent out from England (pale yellow), similar edgings of an advertisement from Neal's Stores (bright orange), the dust-jacket from a friend's volume of poetry (pale yellow again), and orange grocers' bags. Nor did we have electric lights upon our Christmas tree, but candles. We would have nothing to do with this illumination business.

Yet in the end we were responsible for the finest illumination in the whole district, lighting up, not our street only, but Main Street itself, where—I have his word for it—a policeman saw it.

This is how it happened. On Christmas night we went out to dinner. There was a fire insurance agent there who talked about his business, trying to press us into a policy. On the night of Boxing Day we asked friends in to dine with us. Many more we asked in afterwards, to sit around the fire, to drink coffee and eat peppermints and play games of the less intelligent sort. Dinner was over, the earthen coffee-pot was brewing by the fire, and our friends had begun to assemble. I had safely hoarded up a great birch log, a Yule log, especially for this night. I brought it from the basement and put it on the fire. Suddenly I heard a rapping and a shouting at the door. A noisy guest, I thought, one of these fellows that think they're funny. Soon he'll be breaking out into *Good King Wenceslas* or a college yell. I let him rap. He rapped the louder. So I went to let him in. He was an enormous policeman, looking more than usually an out-size by reason of the buffalo coat he wore and the buffalo cap upon his head. His message

was a simple one. The chimney was on fire. He strode to the telephone and rang up the fire brigade. Prompted by the tune of *London's Burning* I fetched some water. And we gave the Yule log a sousing. Meanwhile more guests were arriving, and complete strangers kept dashing into the house to ask us whether we knew that our chimney was on fire. Outside a crowd had collected. It was only afterwards that we thought of sending a hat round among them, so that the entertainment should not be quite gratuitous. But my bright ideas come always too late.

Then came the fire brigade, or rather, the fire department, to use the unromantic transatlantic name. There was a horrid hooting in Main Street. Trams came to a dead stop, motor cars drew up, pedestrians skedaddled out of the way. And the firemen trooped in. I am sorry to say that they did not wear brass helmets; that came as a poignant disappointment. Their oilskins made them look more like fishermen than fire-fighters. I am even sorrier to say that there was no fire left for them to put out. They brought chemical squirters into the house. They gazed up the chimney with a bull's-eye lantern. They potted around the basement and the attic. They peeped into the bedroom.

But they could find no spark or smoke. We were not to light the fire again that night. And we were to have the sweep in the morning.

So we played our games. Hobbies and games and leisure-hour pursuits—they do not go in for these things very much in the Canada of to-day. In the old days folk were too busy and nowadays there are the mechanized pursuits. Hostesses do not produce jars full of pencils for improvised poetry or for novels to which each player contributes a more astonishing sentence than the last. You encounter few bug hunters, stamp maniacs, swappers of beetles or of coins. Even dog owners fail to take their charges very seriously. There were some amongst our guests to whom the classic phrase, 'Animal, vegetable, or mineral?' was a new one, to whom it had to be elaborately explained. Yet the games went well. Unable to roast our chestnuts (not Spanish chestnuts, these, but Japanese) we set two candles beside the fireplace, in memory of what might have been. And we could see little of the sorrowful blackened logs because a young gentleman sat with his back to them. Towards the end of the evening I noticed that he gave a sudden twitch. He moved forward. He looked round. He exclaimed—and so did we all.

The fire was burning merrily again, all of its own accord. We did not put it out.

Very early in the morning the chimney-sweep arrived. There was little work for him to do. The soot had mostly burnt away. But when I paid his bill it was very sorrowfully that I called to mind the coal company that had offered to do the job for nothing.

MY PATH

THE trouble about living in a geometrically planned city like ours is that there are so few short cuts. The English immigrant might expect to cut across the corner made by Portage Avenue and Main Street, our two principal thoroughfares (so wide that you can only just see across them), but the thing is impossible; he may go that way, but he cannot go straight; he must go round corners one after another. The Yorkshireman will look in vain for the 'snickets' and 'ginnels' of his youth; the Cockney will find none of those hidden silent lanes that are a perpetual discovery in London, such as that which cuts the corner between Oxford Street and the Tottenham Court Road. Only we have our vacant lots, ragged fragments of the prairie left stranded in the city, across which man's instinct for directness makes dusty paths in the summer, treads hard the snow of winter and braves the mire of spring.

So one night I lay in bed wondering whether in the morning I would have the courage to

keep my path open. I might look so foolish struggling through the snowdrifts knee-deep, perhaps, or thigh-deep, who could tell? A real Old Timer had described to me the day's performance as a real old-time blizzard and told wild tales of being lost on the prairies in his youth. I felt at last some rationale for my fur cap, that it was neither merely an ornament nor merely an absurdity, and I felt half-inclined to undo the little ribbon and pull the flaps down over my ears. Two boys came at evening and asked whether they might clear the snow away from my door for a nickel. And men told stories of how in times gone by such winds had lasted for weeks. So I lay in bed wondering how my path would be in the morning. The wind howled outside as I have only known the wind to howl off-stage in a Chekhov play. It died away in the distance, then came to rattle at my own storm window and visit me through the three small holes left open. It was watching me, I knew, and wondering. Would I play the man in the morning?

I knew that path so well. I knew and was proud of the little twist by which instead of being a mere track that crossed a vacant lot it became a path directing men to *my* door. I knew the little notice-board, set so lowly

in the ground, hardly above the heads of the wild asters that flowered there in summer, which proclaimed that this desirable building-site was for sale. The notice-board had lately been removed and the old one left lying on the ground to rot beneath the snow. I knew the place where the ashes from a public hall were tipped, and I had marvelled often at the majestic clinkers with which the pile was crowned. I had fished out some pretty big ones from my own furnace but none so fine as these. I knew the allotment garden on one side where in fairer weather my neighbour grew cabbages and that horticultural fantasy, the kohlrabi. And I knew where the snow-drifts would be thickest. For in summer the path is anybody's path, but in winter it is mine.

Whenever the snow has fallen freshly I button on my overshoes and set out to make my path anew. I know the way to go. I know where the snow has been beaten hard by my steps of yesterday. I know where a false step may mean a deep drop into snow, a possible loss of balance even. And I have been glad to see that though I have broken the trail, others have followed in my pioneering ways. One day I sat proudly down to dinner because on my journey home I had encountered my

neighbour's wife setting out with her shopping bag towards Main Street and treading delicately in the way that I had made. And once I was ill-tempered for half a day because fresh snow had fallen and others had been out to tread the way before me. They had stumbled into the pitfalls that I knew so well how to avoid. They had straightened out the little twist that made the way my own. I had to do the work all over again.

But after the last snow I felt that I should have no competitors. No one else would play the fool in the snowdrifts. I could mould them to my heart's desire. And when morning came I buttoned on my overshoes with purpose. Very soon I was jogging west on the long trail—the trail that is always new. The path was opened up again, though it was yet no place of common trade. My footprints sank deep in the drifts and snow was lodged in the folds of my trousers. But the wind-swept snow will fill the holes again, the way will be beaten hard, and I shall watch to see my neighbours risk the path once more. And it may be that I shall take fifteen seconds less each day to reach my work than if I walked round by the ordinary causeway, trodden hard by the hurrying masses and cleared by the city's unemployed.

INTO THE FROZEN NORTH

It is not really in Winnipeg that we live, but in the old Red River Settlement, a little to the north of the city, the first agricultural settlement of white men west of the Great Lakes. The name, like many another famous in the history of the land, has passed from common use. When, at the close of an evening's entertainment in the city, I glance at my watch and remark that we must be hurrying away as it takes quite a long time to get to the Red River Settlement, men look at me with a pained and puzzled expression. The Red River Settlement . . . but that was long ago. Nowadays they patronize the district as St. John's—the name of our cathedral when the rector of Poplar Point on the Assiniboine headed a subscription list with the sum of five pounds 'for a chapel at Winnipeg town.' Others scorn it as the North End. Sometimes they are positively rude and call it 'down at the graveyard,' or ring us up on the telephone to inquire what the weather is like beyond the subway. But

we do not mind. We have history behind us. Ours is the paradise of Old Timers. The greatest of these were born here. The Old Timers, they have seen the city grow beneath their eyes, but they have always been a little aloof. They can never be quite bothered with this upstart place. Winnipeg has come into being within living memory. The Red River Settlement was there before. That is the difference.

The Red River flows by us, five minutes' walk from our doors. But in summer it plays very little part in our lives. Very seldom does the siren of a steamer remind us that water leads all the way to London; very seldom does the great bridge swing open to let a merchant vessel pass, though the fair white gulls that fly above its course speak strangely of the ocean. No broad walks line the river's banks. Like so much of London River, it is neglected, and we have no Mr. A. P. Herbert to spread the evangel of the water bus. But in winter it comes into its own. As soon as it is frozen it becomes a highway. It is not, in the city at least, a very good highway, for the city has its sewers which it is necessary to dodge. But it is firm to cross. The snow upon it is well marked with the imprint of snowshoes

and of skis. Distant places suddenly become quite near. They are only across the river after all.

I had waited anxiously for the river's freezing. A river frozen over, a river wider than the Trent at Newark, would be something new in my experience. Early in the autumn I began to think of it, and to speak of it a little, too. Would it not be a good thing, I said to a friend, some time to walk through the night down the river, perhaps as far as Selkirk? He said it would. And when the river froze I bought some snowshoes. I bought more than that. My friend insisted on what he called an outfit. Grey trousers were not sufficient. I must have riding-breeches. Moccasins I bought and gloves that had no fingers to them, and I set aside three pairs of thick woollen socks to wear with one pair of thick woollen stockings on the night. I did not tell any one else about the project. I treasured it silently and secretly. After all, there is a lunatic asylum at Selkirk. I gave my outfit one trial and then I hid it. I know the scorn these Canadians have for a foolish project, their fears for an unprotected Englishman wandering at night. I know also their respect for the foolish project once it has become an accomplished fact. They are

pragmatists on this side of the Atlantic, lovers of deeds, not talk.

However, my friend got busy. He was not as bashful as I am. He canvassed a dozen of his acquaintances and found one who readily would go with us. The others all countered his proposal with the unanswerable question: 'What 's the idea?' But our third conspirator added greatly to our plans. He had a friend who lived four miles beyond Selkirk, a small farmer who laughed loudly at our project when broached upon the telephone, but offered us hospitality if ever we should arrive. A second friend offered us refreshment at a point half-way to our destination—and offered us also a car to take us the remainder of the journey! We consulted our diaries and fixed upon a date. December 29th. There would be a fairish moon to light our way. And we would start at three o'clock in the afternoon.

In the morning I was kept busy with my work. I was determined to see no visitors but to go steadily ahead until the job was done, that with a clear conscience I might spend my night in the open. But I saw one young man go through the house with an intent air. He had come to oil my moccasins. By three o'clock, when my companions arrived, I was getting

into the outfit. I know certainly that I have never worn so many clothes before. A catalogue of them would disgust a squeamish reader. On my head I wore a fur cap—my Old Timer's cap it has come to be called—and we each of us carried a haversack that contained provender or cooking utensils.

Three travellers, we took the road^d
On a winter's day and cold,

and three very strange travellers we must have looked, lending verisimilitude to the motion pictures of the far North-West, especially those of Mr. Charlie Chaplin in *The Gold Rush*. Very bulky we looked, and rough, with frying-pan handles and the like sticking out at odd corners. Late in the night, when a girl passed us on a lonely road, she fled. I was not surprised.

We did not set off on snowshoes. These we carried, and the streets of the city knew our soft moccasins (well oiled) only. For we set off, most unromantically, by tram, demanding transfers as we boarded it, and meeting astounded acquaintances within, and finding it very difficult, in such voluminous clothing, to sit down. Soon we had to change from one tram to another. We saw our second car just about to start. We made a dash for it:

biscuits and buttered scones scattered on the pavement marked our way. I noticed an amused young lady's face observing us. I thought I recognized it.

At length our joggings all were done, and we emerged from the last car at East St. Paul, four miles or so upon our way, near the river's eastern bank. We put on our snowshoes and set out, at first upon the road, or rather, in the drifts and ditches by its side. One or two motors passed us and a horse and sled. There were houses too, screened away in the brushwood; so that the roadside was dotted with those small galvanized-iron letter-boxes, mark of the rural mail delivery, like pigeon-holes on stilts, that form one of the most characteristic features in the landscape of the New World. 'Somewhere hidden away,' they seem to say, 'there is a house. You may not notice it, perhaps, but it is there. Actually it wouldn't take you ten minutes to reach the front door. But we won't go bothering the postman to walk all that way. No, we'll just wait here like a poor-box, to receive his contribution as he goes by.' It is only in the cities of our land that you may hear the postman's knock.

We followed a track down to the river and

soon we felt very small, treading on a great white waste. The bush was only a fringe on either side. There were no footprints. Since the last snow nobody else had been there. We were the first that ever burst. . . . We were monarchs of all we surveyed. The frozen river, for one night only, was our own. Our right there was none to dispute. Soon in all its pageantry the sun went down. Were I a painter in these lands I would paint not the lands but the skies. For there is almost all our scenery, colour and vivid line hung above our heads, above the city as above the long low plain. From the prairies the skies seem twice as spacious as anywhere else in the world. But I cannot paint them with words. Late afternoon had swiftly changed to night by the time that we turned again to the river's eastern bank, to kindle our fire in the brushwood and to cook our supper.

For a long time, I do not know how long, the moon had been hanging white in the sky, like an expectant ghost awaiting a certain return to the warmth of flesh and blood. So as the daylight faded the moonlight grew more bright. The Great Bear stood above us, though my friends, long dwellers in this land, irreverently named the constellation the Dipper.

A pioneer race must seek its utensils even in the sky. The Pole Star surely pointed out our way, to Selkirk and beyond. Very soon also we were speaking of Orion. We had trod through deep snowdrifts and climbed again the short, steep river's bank, almost the only steep natural incline in all the wide country-side. Here, amongst the brushwood, whilst the rising moon cast laced shadows on the snow, we scooped a hole and covered it with twigs for flooring, then lit our fire above. We were not ordinary travellers who kindle fires with newspapers or orange-peel or disused envelopes: We carried birch bark with us from the Red River Settlement. And soon the fire was blazing. So were we alternately both hot and very cold, hot when we boiled the soup or stabbed the sausages, cold when we stood aside or stumbled in the bush to collect dead poplar wood and willow, the meagre timber of the river bank. But the sausages were very good, the tea was hot, the cake was a Christmas present from England. Nor did I previously know that such excellent soup could be made from melted snow.

Once again we set out upon our way, and now the risen moon made us seem more than ever explorers dwarfed by the greatness of the

white space we had discovered; for it cast tiny shadows before us that might have been the shadows of pigmies. We did not turn aside for several miles until upon the western bank we saw a building that was lighted up. It was a large building, its size surprised us all. At the end was a lighted sun-parlour whose windows were uncovered. Within there were figures moving. We climbed the bank that we might the better observe. They were children moving in a solemn folk-dance under a mistress's vigilant eye. So our wilderness was inhabited after all. Nor was it wholly ours. And as we trod on we could see the lights of a last train that left the city, and heard its low moaning sound of warning, like the mooing of some cosmic cow, as it went northwards towards the lake.

Yet still the world seemed very quiet. We had no courage to shout or even sing, but spoke as if we were afraid that others might be listening. Our feet made little noise as we trod upon the snow, though our snowshoes clattered somewhat on the ice where it was black, swept clear by the wind. Then suddenly out of the darkness we heard voices.

'Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!'

This was foolishness. Not the sort of thing

that we would pay attention to, at any rate. Just a few lads being silly.

‘Hallo! Are you the three trampers?’

This was strange, for we might certainly be described as the three trampers. An impolite man might even have called us the three tramps. Whose could these voices be? Surely the reporters had not got wind of our adventure? I foresaw it all, the publicity, the headlines, the photographs that were to be. One of us called back cautiously, but a little weakly:

‘Which three trampers?’

‘On snowshoes.’

The reply came instantly, staggering in its accuracy. Yet still we did not feel safe to cross the river. Bandits have their intelligence system too.

‘Who are you?’ we called out.

‘Oh, just some fellows from here who want to tell you something.’

So out into the night we sent an advance guard, a scout to meet these strangers. He returned with a tiny note written by our half-way friend, who had set out in a car to meet us but had feared a shortage of petrol and so returned. At Lockport, where he lived, we were to go to one house and not to another. That was all. Yet we felt triumphant. In the

heart of the wilderness we had established communication with the outside world.

Our messengers told us that henceforward the river would be none too safe, that there were occasional places where it flowed more rapidly and where the ice was thin. Soon we found that they had spoken truly. Suddenly a foot slipped through the ice. I was glad it was not mine. We were near the shore, and so we decided now to walk on land. First we paused to eat three Japanese oranges that I had carried in my pocket. This is a more insipid but pipless form of tangerine. EASY TO PEEL. GOOD FOR CHILDREN. Such is their slogan displayed on every box. We did *not* find them easy to peel, for they were frozen stiff. But we found them very good, like a novel form of water ice.

Now we sometimes strayed from the river's winding course, plunging through drifts and over fields, climbing the barbed-wire fencing that separated the old river lots: these had been measured in early days by the distance that a man could see from beneath a horse's belly. Then we came upon landmarks that for long we had been seeking, the rectory, the schools, and the church of St. Andrew's, the old settlement at the rapids, raised on an

eminence of a very few feet above the river. We came first to the rectory, a long, two-storied building made of large blocks of stone. It is a typical big house of the early days, solid and honest, built by those who had left their homeland before the flotsam-laden flood-tide of the Gothic revival. One room had been repaired and was being used as an additional schoolroom; the rest was in a poor state. There were also two school buildings, one large and modern, the other small and old. The white boards of the second concealed the logs of which it was built, and my companions told me that it was the oldest school building in the province that was still in active use.

In the larger building we saw a light, and we crept nearer to learn what business might be afoot. It was a school board meeting that was in progress. Doubtless they had read the minutes of the last meeting and were settling down to business. They would go for an hour or so longer, proposing motions and seconding them and putting them to the house—for nowhere do they treat these matters more gravely than in this land whose pride is informality. The whole seemed strangely unreal, queerly absurd. We were well named 'the three

trampers.' We were gaining the tramp's-eye view of life.

Then we walked around the church amongst its old tombstones. It is a fine upstanding stone building with a dignified tower, and it was built in 1849, thirteen years before the first actual domestic house in Winnipeg. Yet the frost had so played amongst its stones that to my English eyes it appeared medieval. It is really far more than medieval. In the life of the country it is primitive. It should be the glory of this land. For it is as near a miracle as anything I have discovered here. It was built by the first settlers. They had travelled thousands of miles in dangerous ways, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by their own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, and then, with scant tools and little expert advice, they built this large church, a monument to God. They hewed their own boards, they cut their own stone, out of buffalo skins they made their kneelers. The church has little loveliness within, though few visitors can escape the loveliness of its mere fact, but without its quiet certainty speaks of an age of faith.

Yet as we walked round in the snow we felt despondent rather than proud. Western

Canada has not done enough to preserve the monuments of her past. We counted the great cracks in the building and wondered how long she would stand. In fifty years this noblest building on the river's bank might well be gone. The depopulated parish could not afford to do the repairs, and in a time of depression very few others had money to waste on sentiment. Often men had spoken to me of the Old Country and of its wonderful historical associations, but here was an Old Country at their very doors, whose historical associations were very real indeed. I quoted to my companions, as best I could remember it, the magnificent scorn of Mr. Chesterton's sonnet, *On hearing a landlord accused (falsely, for all the bard can say) of neglecting one of the numerous white horses that were or were not connected with Alfred the Great.*

Can you not even conserve? For if indeed
The White Horse fades: then closer creeps the fight
When we shall scour the face of England white,
Plucking such men as you up like a weed,
And fling them far beyond a shaft shot right
When Wessex went to battle for the creed.

My indignation was righteous but unnecessary. A month had hardly passed before the rector of St. Andrew's knocked at my door to tell

me they had started a fund for the restoration of the church, and in summer there was scaffolding about the tower.

Three miles along the river brought us to the great dam at Lockport, the village, bridge, and inn, the neat and newly plastered church, the notices that advertised ice-cream sarcastically at night when the temperature was just above zero, and to the lighted house of our friends. Here it seemed that half the world had come out to meet us, so that there was much bustling about and a suggestion that somewhere in the background, hidden to the eye, a kettle was approaching the boil. We shook off snow, wiped off snow, brushed off snow, called out to those within that we were just coming, peeled off various layers of our thick woollen clothing, and slipped into the drowsy good fellowship of a house-party. Everybody began to say how much he wished that he were making the trip with us, or how heartily glad he was that he had escaped such torture, or to tell us how to find our way beyond Selkirk, or to ask us whether we liked cream in it and sugar. And in the midst of it all, handing round the sandwiches and buns, was the young lady who had watched *our* buns go flying as we rushed to catch the tram in Winnipeg,

whose face I thought that I recognized. But we were growing drowsier, and we knew that we must not linger long else civilization might claim us for its own. For the moment we were in civilization, but for the night we were not of it. We made signs to each other that we must be going; we clambered into our night armour, and once again our snowshoes were clattering on the road.

It was the road we trod and not the river. Towards the river, indeed, we turned our backs. We should not see it again until our journey's end. We followed the straighter ways of man; the men of the New World have left their crooked ways behind them and go very straight indeed, turning neither to left nor right except at an angle of exactly ninety degrees. It might almost have seemed that we were seeking the city again. For as we reached the main road a street car rattled by, the last of the day to make the twenty-mile journey to Selkirk. We might have hailed it; a few cents only were needed to break our journey's back. But we let it go. Besides, we were already approaching the walls and low towers of Lower Fort Garry.

Once I had been to the fort before, in August, when British doctors were being fêted

in Winnipeg and not a few of the citizens managed to be fêted too. It was a hot day. We walked in gardens. We crowded breathlessly for tea. We listened to Ukrainian singers and a band. We listlessly examined the curios displayed in the storehouse. They told me that the place was now a country club for people who owned motor cars, and that somewhat tarnished its glamour. And the heat was far more trying than ever the cold could be. Only the river beyond the walls was cool. For there young ladies and young gentlemen were bathing. They were surf-riding on planks behind a motor boat. They were having a high old time.

The fort seemed very different in winter, a little after midnight, with a fairish moon still shining, and the temperature two degrees above zero. The last tram had gone clanking home to its barn. Ninety years were fled. All the little flim-flams of our modern social life had disappeared. We felt like explorers discovering the remains of an earlier civilization. High snowdrifts enabled us to climb the fort's not very lofty walls, that were wide enough, however, for us to walk upon in snowshoes. Within all was still and quiet. There was no light. There were no footprints. There was

not even the barking of a dog to rouse the ghosts to warfare. But, if I have read my history aright, the story of this fort, unlike that of the Upper Fort at the river forks in Winnipeg, has always been peaceful. We had not so much as a revolver in our pockets. Our occupation also was peaceable.

It seemed an unreal fancy, as we trod, that this place was now the Auto-Drivers' Club. Now even the most callous clubman, the most hardened auto-driver might feel a little eerie and pause to think of tomahawks and scalps. There were bars still upon the jail windows. And, for the moment, the governor's house was a governor's house again; the barracks still were barracks; the Hudson's Bay Company was a ruling power in the land, not a retail store in Portage Avenue. We left a goodly array of footprints behind us before we had completed our survey. Then again we climbed the walls, and, after horrid moments of trepidation, leapt into the deep snowdrifts beyond.

Since now our walk was to be upon a well-kept, snow-ploughed road, we carried our snowshoes and walked more softly in our moccasins. A distance of four miles separates Lower Fort Garry from Selkirk; I recollect it

only as a steady tramp. From Upper Church, which is St. John's Cathedral, through Middle Church to Lower Church, which is St. Andrew's, we had traversed the length of the Red River Settlement, which, through the visionary schemes of Lord Selkirk in endeavouring to right the wrongs of crofters evicted in Scotland, became the first agricultural settlement in the Canadian North-West, and the mother of all her churches. When we reached the town that bears Lord Selkirk's name it seemed, to my immigrant eyes, more an area than a town. Yet once, my companions told me, the hopes of Selkirk ran high. Selkirk men might have tramped by night to Winnipeg to find it more an area than a town. It is a commonplace that the development, even the situation of Canadian cities has been dependent far more upon the coming of the railway than any other factor. When, in the seventies of last century, the Canadian Pacific Railway was planned, its directors intended that the crossing of the Red River should be made at Selkirk, a port with easy access to the lake. Buildings were rushed up. The young men saw visions and the old men dreamed dreams. Then the plans were changed. The railway went to Winnipeg instead, which swiftly became the one big city

of our province, so that we have no engrossing rivalries like the one between Calgary and Edmonton that so amused Rupert Brooke as he journeyed by night in the train. Selkirk has its industries to-day. It has also large gaunt buildings that testify to a far-off hope.¹

¹John Macoun's *Manitoba and the Great North-West*, published in 1882, contains an amusing passage: 'At the present time Selkirk contains, besides a large number of dwelling-houses, five general stores, one drug store and telegraph office, and numerous other businesses. Besides, there are four churches and schools suitable for the population. It is scarcely wise in a matter-of-fact man like myself to become a prophet, but I may state that I see so far into the future as to say that, about the middle of the coming summer, the iron horse will reach Selkirk on its way to the west, and as it turns south its drivers, who will be many and very strong, will be asked why turn ye away from the river, and they will answer, like the men of old, because there is no passage for our steed and the train that follows it. Then a very learned man will stand forth and say, Listen unto me, ye men of might who drive the iron horse, behold, a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. They will be astonished at this and take down their measuring instruments, and behold, the scales will fall from their eyes, and they will see that it is so, and a passage for their steed will be built, and it will go on its way to the west without turning either to the right hand or to the left. Then will the head of the Selkirk be lifted up, and she will stand on her feet and be much talked of among the people, because there will be a boom there. Behold, this must come to pass because it is written on the tablets of the future.'

It is scarcely wise in a matter-of-fact man to become a prophet.

Now we came to the last stage upon our journey, that last lap about which men will never cease to be romantic. There would be no more towns. 'Nothing much between here and Norway House,' said one of my companions. 'And not very many houses between us and the North Pole,' I added. For the urban development of Canada is yet little more than a ribbon across a continent. Now we had stepped off the ribbon at a place where it was very thin. There would be no more villas, no more little stucco bungalows in the Spanish Mission style looking absurd in the snow; there would be no more factories. The summer cottages beside the lake were all boarded up for the winter. Life here in this land, and especially in winter, was primitive and hard. Every man must of necessity be a workman. Even motor cars were largely put away till the snow should melt; and the horse came into his own. So we walked on, steadily northwards. And there came a time when we saw a light. What was a light doing, shining so brightly there so late at night? It was lit especially for us. It marked the bourne we sought. Yet still it was a long way off, and as I walked my mind was filled with old nursemaids' tales of children lost in forests, and

hunters on the plains amidst pitch darkness and with no food but berries (somehow berries never failed), yet guided to safe lodging in the end by the shining of a light in a distant house. Now, at last, I understood those stories. I understood them by experience. For where, without that light and all for which it stood, would we now be? Lost upon a cold plain with no berries even to cheer us.

'So you 've come,' said our friend, when we knocked upon his door. 'I was just giving you up for hopeless.' We had set out at three o'clock in the afternoon, and now it was three o'clock again. The little house in which, in the expressive Canadian phrase, he was 'baching' greeted us warmly. The coal stove was not out, and our host soon lit a fire of wood in a great fire-place of his own construction, lit it on the top of high piles of ashes, the brave memorial of midnight flames and gaiety gone by. And very soon the kettle had been brought to the boil.

There were other visitors in the house beside ourselves. Two boys on holiday from school were asleep in the adjoining room. But there was bedding enough for all. And as we settled down to food—supper, breakfast, dinner, it was none of these things; we need new names

for the unusual meals of vagabonds at night—he suggested turning on the radio. ‘Won’t it wake the boys?’ we asked. ‘Take a cart and horse to do that,’ was the reply. But I fancied that I heard a chuckle from the room beyond, and in the morning I found that I was right. But I was amazed that there should be a wireless programme available at such an hour. ‘Goes on pretty well all night,’ said our friend. ‘It comes in from the States.’ Apparently in America there is no ‘Good night, everybody.’ Night has been obliterated. Very soon the room was filled with the wheezing sound of jazz. The desert had become a ball-room. Which was never prophesied by Isaiah.

Sofas soon were transformed into beds, and I was nodding off to slumber. But quickly I was awake again. Whether it was light or not I do not know, but at any rate it was morning, morning for my host whose cattle must be milked. Two hours’ sleep sufficed for him that night. When he saw that my eyes were open he said to me: ‘When the boys get up, tell them to put the potatoes in the stew and put the stew on the fire.’ I turned and slept. Yet at intervals I awoke and murmured: ‘Put potatoes in stew. Put stew on fire.’ Really, I ought to be getting up. The

hours were slipping by. Already one of my companions had dressed and rushed off, in an inexplicable hurry to get to Portage la Prairie. Put stew on fire. But it was so comfortable in bed. Put potatoes in fire. Then I heard a stirring. Two tousled heads suddenly appeared. 'I say,' I said, 'you 've got to put the potatoes in the stew and put the stew on the fire.' 'Oh, the Mulligan!' they cried together. A great sense of relief swept over me. I had done my job. I had delivered my message. I sank to sleep again.

However wont the boys might be to condemn the Mulligan—and it had been their staple fare, they complained, for a week—it served us very well. We were refreshed and ready in the early afternoon to walk again to Selkirk. But this time we forsook the road, and returned to our first love, the Red River. There was no fear now that we should put our feet through the ice. The very cracks testified to our safety, displaying the ice's thickness. And the only holes were those contrived especially by man for obtaining water. We followed what appeared to be a tributary river, and here, near to Selkirk, we came to famous ships embedded in the ice, the *Grand Rapids*, veteran of Lake Winnipeg, the *Keenora*, famous

passenger steamer, and the *Wolverine*. These were typical lake steamers, wood-built and wood-burners. My friend recommended me to try a trip upon the *Wolverine*. The others, so he said, would be filled in summer-time with school teachers; there would be an orchestra aboard and dancing in the evenings. (I must confess that this all looked very unlikely on the cold afternoon of 30th December.) But the *Wolverine* kept to no very regular programme. She popped into whatever harbours had cargo to offer, popped in often at the most inconvenient hours of the night. Her passengers were the workers of the land, fishermen, lumbermen, Indians. She was part of the country's life. We passed also the Government cutter *Bradbury*, smart and shapely, looking a little incongruous among the wooden walls of Manitoba, a far-off glimpse of the Royal Navy. There were long oblong scows and much smaller craft. In the Selkirk yards they were building a scow. We tramped into the town only to observe a far orange shape dipping into the distance. It was our street car that was to take us home. We must now wait an hour.

So we walked along the river and watched men cutting ice. They cut it into long slices

and guided them through the water on to a wooden slipway on which they were hauled high into the sheds on the bank. It was all to be used for the frozen fish that came down from the lake. When the ice-cutters had reached the river's farther bank there would be enough ice formed on this side for them to begin again. So the game would go on all winter. A cold game, I thought it. We repaired to a Chinese restaurant, where, amongst Icelanders and half-breeds, we were regaled with apple-pie and coffee. But the ice-cutters went on with their job. Then a second orange car appeared and soon we were in Winnipeg.

DOMESTIC INTERLUDE

WHEN a dweller in this city displays to his friends a new purchase, two questions are most normally asked of him. First, and very naturally: What did it cost? Secondly: Was it a Special? To the uninstructed immigrant this question about Specials may well seem somewhat puzzling. 'What is a Special?' I have heard, amongst loud laughter, one innocently to inquire. Specials, indeed, are most important things in our life, and the harvesting of Specials makes a housekeeper's romance. It is all a device of the shopkeepers to lure more people to their shops. Not only do the big stores have their regular sales—so that, although we left London in time of sales, we rejoiced to find that in Winnipeg they were not quite over—but they have their irregular sales also. Each day of the shopping week some one line or other, electric irons or overcoats, pianos or pen-nibs or permanent waves, is being marketed at a reduced price. Specials are advertised of '6,000 Strictly New-laid Eggs,' and a

kindly intentioned Miss Jones rings us up weekly on the telephone to inform us of a dry-cleaning Special. If you wait long enough your turn will always come. You can either buy your things casually, when you want them or when the fit takes you, in which circumstances you must pay the high price; or you can buy them at the shopkeeper's dictation and secure them cheap. You save your money but you sink your pride.

In England very few people think of going shopping early in the morning. You do not turn in to Selfridge's at nine or run round to Harrod's at a quarter-past. Even at ten you feel something of an outcast. They are still sweeping and polishing. There are assistants, indeed, by the dozens, by the hundreds, but each is making some small preparation for the day's long fray. There's not another customer. You feel like a man who has arrived twenty minutes too early for a dinner-party—the host is still upstairs, angrily adjusting his tie. . . . But there's nothing like that here. The Nine o'Clock Specials see to that. I have been told that there is sometimes a queue outside by half-past eight; but I've never been there to see.

There are other Specials also designed for

a certain hour; noon, shall we say? You are surprised, in passing through the shop to the restaurant, to observe a group of expectant people waiting round a stall. No one is buying anything. Then suddenly a bell rings. Seconds leave the ring. Prize-fighting has commenced.

Shopping thus becomes a kind of warfare, a long and hazardous campaign demanding foresight, patience, sudden decisions, early risings, and a readiness to 'cash and carry.' There is little satisfaction to be found in it, no certainty of ultimate victory. The ordinary shopper has a haggard, worried look; she has secured her Special, but she may have missed a better Special somewhere else. Our housewives must develop a sixth or Special sense. Each day they study the newspaper advertisements and make their plans accordingly. There is a type of shopper who never misses a Special that she needs. Likewise there is one who never obtains it. She sees it advertised the next morning as she peels the potatoes on yesterday's newspaper. She is an embittered woman.

My library has benefited considerably from this scheme. We have few second-hand bookshops here, but on the other hand we have astonishing opportunities to buy new books cheaply. Lacking apparently the wholesome

discipline of a 'Net Books Agreement,' our two big stores are able to treat books as they treat any other line of goods. The weakest go to the wall. If they want to, our commercial magnates can reduce even Mr. Bernard Shaw. If books remain unsold after a certain period of time, they are not allowed to cumber the shelves. They are unloaded on to a central table, like slabs of wood unloaded from a cart, and there men go and grab. There are good things grabbable, almost all at half their usual price. I have just secured, in perfect condition, the two volumes of *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice* at a quarter of the sum first asked for them. A month ago they were on sale at half-price, but I bided my time and reaped my reward. Likewise, also, at one time or other, I have grabbed Mr. Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, the second series of *The Mercury Book*, Mr. F. S. Oliver's *Endless Adventure*, and Miss Sackville-West's poem *The Land*. This last cost me, in English money, fivepence. A soiled volume of Mr. A. P. Herbert's was flung at me for twopence halfpenny. Which is perhaps the price these words will fetch when at last they reach the grabbing table.

Early in the winter there was advertised in

one of our local stores a Special of ice-hockey sticks. I rushed off for mine. How much did I want to pay, I was asked—twenty-five or thirty-five cents? Twenty-five, I said, would do. I bore my stick proudly home. I showed it to my wife. A good stick, I said; cheap, too. And only when I reached the skating rink did I realize that I had been sold an instrument designed for a child. Very fortunately it swiftly broke in two.

When first I heard that the rink was frozen I experienced a mixture of eagerness and reluctance to be upon the ice. Every winter since I was a child of eight has been cheered for me by the hope of skating—and sometimes it was only by the hope. Now we would have months of it—months of it in a shed. My Canadian friends all took it quite casually, they were only surprised that I had ever been on the ice before. They did not know the suppressed enthusiasm that skating means for many an English boy. I have bicycled ten miles to skate a few yards on a tiny pond. I have spent evenings with emery paper and a file, and when I said my prayers on such nights my principal petition was that the ice would hold. I remembered the grand January of 1917, when skating in the Midlands lasted for three weeks,

and when each afternoon the school was granted a half-holiday for fear the thaw would come before the morrow. Indeed I remembered all the places where I had been on skates—I did not say where I had skated, for I knew that to Canadian eyes I would be but an ordinary beginner—Rather Heath in Westmorland, the first and loveliest of all, and the Kendal rink where now is only a housing scheme. Deep ponds and marshes near the River Trent. The Derby and Nottingham Canal. The Leeds and Liverpool Canal. The Kendal and Lancaster Canal. Small ponds there were on Baildon Moor and small ponds also near Otley Chevin. The big expanse of the reservoir at Rawdon, where men sold you cups of tea upon the ice. A deep, dangerous pond just off the Madingley Road, where a man could feel, as never in a covered rink, the danger lurking underneath the cracking ice.

Then is not death at watch
Within those secret waters ?
What wants he but to catch
Earth's heedless sons and daughters ?
With but a crystal parapet
Between, he has his engines set.

More safe were the flooded fields down Ditton way and the River Cam itself. A great sheet

of pure black ice I recollected also in Hertfordshire from which we were turned away, after a long day's skating, in which at first we only skirted the edges yet later ventured right across, because it was not safe. And was there not lastly the lake in Regent's Park, with half London upon it?

Yet in all these places, I knew well, I had hardly learnt to skate. I had learnt only to dash about and enjoy myself and get up an appetite for tea. I presented myself in fear at our little covered rink. But of one thing at least I was certain. I was not likely to fall in.

Soon I was relieved to find that no one expected me to cut a figure eight nor yet a three. Skating rinks, like the undergraduates of Oxford, may be divided roughly into the categories of hearty and aesthete. And ours was essentially a hearty rink. What I was expected to do was to hold a hockey stick firmly in my hand and rush across the ice after the slithering puck. This, in a measure, I soon learnt to do. Yet still I was a creature of the land whilst all my friends had wings.

Other Specials besides my hockey stick I bought, more satisfactory ones. There came a time when most things in the house got

weighed. When I came in for dinner I would run round to the kitchen to see how things were getting on and to weigh something new. I weighed something also the last thing at night before I went to bed. Groceries were checked immediately upon their arrival; every pound was proved to be avoirdupois, not troy. The *Kendal Cookery Book*, the best threepennyworth that ever came out of England, the most valuable of all our settlers' effects, had put off the day for long. For in its pages—on page 71, to be exact—we had learnt that with dry materials such as flour or rice, 'one teaspoonful equals a quarter of an ounce, one dessertspoonful half an ounce, one tablespoonful' (you have guessed it already) 'one ounce, one teacupful equals a quarter of a pound.' Such glad approximations could not last for ever. There are teacups and teacups. One of mine there is that would hold rather a pound of rice than a quarter of a pound, though I greatly hope that it will never be filled with so dreary and nutritious a substance. In the end we needed scales, though actually it was a spring balance we obtained on a spring balance Special day. So very soon I was weighing everything. I know now that my overshoes weigh a pound and a quarter each, that when I put my diary

into my pocket I add just two and a half ounces to the sum total of my weight.

Weights for me have always had a fascination. I shall never forget the tall old scales we used at home, tall enough not to disgrace a butcher's shop. The pile of weights, from half an ounce to half a stone, were kept in a narrow brown basket, and I have played with them for hours on end. The whole pile came in particularly useful when there were flowers or leaves to be pressed. Even more enthralling were the letter weights. These had been bought in India and consequently there were two piles of brass weights, one registering in ounces, the other in tolas. Tolas! the word spelt impossible romance. Even when last I was home I liked to discover what my letters weighed in tolas, to weigh them, as it were, against the fabled treasure of the Orient. So, were I to journey on, via Vancouver to Calcutta, I should easily slip into the ways of life out there, at least into their weights and measures. I have been brought up amongst tolas. I have sighed for lakhs of rupees. It is only here, in matter-of-fact Canada, amongst those whom missionary societies persistently describe as 'our own kith and kin,' that the weights seem strange. I received my first shock when I discovered that

they sold bananas by the pound. The thing was somehow gross. Then soon I learnt that the stone was an extinct measure in the land, comic as the rod, pole, or perch—though here the rod is not comic in the least. There would be no fun in the weighing-machine any longer. I like to discover my weight—and it is always a discovery to me because I have forgotten what it was last time—but I will not do arithmetic. When a lady tells me—and I have known such surprising confidences—that she weighs just two hundred pounds, I have only a very vague idea as to whether she is to be congratulated or the reverse. Further domestic worries are provided by the little paper labels on the selvedge of our crustless bread. They are very hard to remove and one hesitates to eat them. Even our walnuts are branded with a name. As a boy I learnt to think of wood in cords, but to buy potatoes by the bushel involves calculations that are almost metaphysical. I have no notion of what a bushel of potatoes looks like. I have carried them home often by the stone. Nor can I understand the names of joints. I am used to sirloin; topside and rolled ribs I have ordered from my housekeeper in London, but who, till he had seen the words in print or overheard

them spoken in a butcher's shop, would believe in the reality of chuck roast? In the words of a fellow-immigrant, it sounds so frivolous.

Social customs among which a man has been brought up he takes for granted; English gentlemen do not question the propriety of tails nor do the crowned heads of Europe very often declare that kind hearts are more than coronets. Social customs to which a man is an alien appear as either absurd or terrifying, sometimes as both. Englishmen laugh at the French for their diet of snails: the normal Englishman is terrified when the actual snail is set before him on the dinner-table. Not then is he of the adventuring race of Nelson or of Drake; his first impulse is to cut and run. So was I terrified when I heard of New Year's Day. It was an old Scottish custom, they said. I did not care. It sounded awful. I clung tenaciously to the last remaining days of December. I dreaded January's approach. Even on Christmas Eve, when I should have been hanging up my stocking, the thought oppressed me still. Soon it would be the first of the year. I must accept the long-established custom of the settlement or become a social outcast, be branded up and down the country-side as a bad mixer, a proud and haughty man from the

Old Country. The custom, indeed, is not without its charm. To an Old Timer it is a glad remembrancer of earlier and simpler days. Briefly, what they told me was this. I must call on every lady whom I knew. I must go and pay my homage to the sex. No gentlemen of the house would I encounter—they would be paying calls elsewhere; probably, however, I would get caught up into a herd of predatory males and carried along with them. At any rate, I was to arrive and ring the bell. They would be expecting me. There would be perhaps a biscuit, perhaps a slice of cake, certainly a sandwich, perhaps a cup of tea, perhaps—ah, woeful thought!—alcoholic refreshment within. I was to remember, if possible, to leave a card. Perhaps there would be a book to sign. At the close of the day hostesses were wont to count names and to compare notes. So I mustn't forget.

The New Year dawned, but it did not dawn brightly for me. Overnight I had determined not to go, to take a train for Dauphin or the Pas, but as I dressed the other thought returned, the thought that no Englishman can ever quite slough off, the far-famed slogan of Trafalgar. Yes, I must do my duty, I must play the game, though a mug's game it might be. The

morning's paper gave up a whole page to it. WINNIPEG HOSTESSES PREPARED, it announced in mournful type, though indeed the list was largely of those who were not prepared than of those who were, and I was glad to see that some at least would not expect to hear my knock upon the door. I spent a broody breakfast. Then soon there came a buzzing of the front-door bell. 'Oh, come in,' I said, pleased to greet a friend. 'Run away,' was his astonishing reply. 'It's not you that I have come to see. Where's your wife? And,' he added grimly, 'what are you doing at home? Aren't you going calling? They're expecting you, you know.' I retired to the attic.

But in the afternoon at last I went. I presented myself in my best pressed trousers. I joined the pack of predatory males. I watched from windows other men, my comrades, dashing about at high speed from house to house. Their jaws were set. Their minds were intent. They were doing their duty. They were reckoning up how many houses they had called at, how many still remained upon their list, and how soon they would be done. Men with military pasts were affable in outgrown uniforms. Everybody said that it was a delightful custom and how pleased they were that I had

fitted into it so easily. And was it true that I had *really* walked to Selkirk through the night, and didn't I feel *very* tired in the morning? There were sandwiches going—vertical sandwiches as well as horizontal ones—and buns and tea. There was a faint whiff of alcoholic refreshment. Sometimes I was asked to sign a book. Usually I forgot to leave a card. And eventually all was done. . . . But next New Year I shall certainly go to Dauphin or the Pas.

Whole volumes might be written on the survival of the life of the pioneer in the life of our modern city. It is visible not only in the self-conscious preservation of such settlers' customs as 'square dances' and the calling on New Year's Day; it is present in many other things, unthought of and unrealized. It is only when you leave Winnipeg behind you, when you see a wooden causeway setting off purposefully into the prairie, when you stumble in suburban snowdrifts and look round vaguely and vainly for a road, when you glance back at night and see the city's glow illuminating half the sky, a glow visible often, they tell me, fifty miles away, that you realize how near you are, Parliament buildings, hotels, grain exchange, picture theatres, university, churches

and all, to the simple life of an agricultural people; only then do you realize the miracle that has taken place in a lifetime, and realizing it, discern something of the miracle of all great towns. Scratch a Canadian and you will find a farmer; scratch a farmer and you will find a settler. Even in the city, numerous occasions hint at the life of the pioneer. The early settler had to travel far in the cold to meet his friends. When he met them, for whatever purpose it might be, he liked to make the most of the occasion. The fiddler was told to bring his fiddle with him; the accordion-player stowed his instrument beneath the seat of the cutter before the long cold drive; there was certain to be someone ready to oblige with a song. To-day half our meetings are thus socialized, we slip from devotional addresses to funny stories, from education to minstrelsy. Even when a college is met to confer an honorary degree somebody is pretty certain to get up and sing a couple of songs, and there will be sandwiches to end up with. We really believe that the more we are together the merrier we'll be, and we get together constantly for gatherings that are rather like Pleasant Sunday Afternoons. The two songs follow you everywhere. They have no special merit, they are

acclaimed by no particular applause, but we should be miserable without them. If indeed no daring soloist is present, community singing will probably set in. Songs of the nineties, songs of Edwardian days, songs of the war, all these are shouted out vociferously by every kind of assemblage. Young men drive themselves into frenzies as they conduct the singing of our national favourite, *Alouette*. Sober clergy find themselves entrapped into the action songs of the nursery. Big-hearted business men at luncheon-time croon nigger-minstrel songs to increase their natural good fellowship and to fortify them for the dreary business of the afternoon. The last voice to sing *Yip-I-Addy-I-Ay* will surely be that of a Canadian. Once I was asked to give a lecture on Charles Lamb at a point towards the end of our longest car route. Almost as soon as I had arrived, the audience moaned in concert that they wished to be carried back to old Virginny. Then they declared that it was a long, long trail that wound to the land of their dreams. I said my piece and they were pleased to applaud. Then the thing broke out again. Magic-lantern slides cast words upon a screen and *Just a Song at Twilight* was followed by *Good Night, Ladies*, a ditty which provoked the ladies present to

ride roughshod over the rules of scansion and sing 'Good night, gentlemen.' That was not sufficient. We were soon engrossed in the alarums and excursions of *Three Blind Mice*. Then they sang *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow*, to make me blush and hope they meant Charles Lamb, who was, indeed, rather forgotten by this time, but who was surely noting the whole proceedings with an indulgent eye. We finished up with *Auld Lang Syne*, which I sang most fervently in the company of those who an hour before were strangers, *God save the King*, and a college yell. As they say of certain Anglo-Catholic churches, we 'had everything,' everything, that is, except *O Canada*, which somehow was forgotten. I have never known my emotions to be more strangely stirred.

Another hint of the early life of the community one may note in the frequent desire of public bodies to take one into their confidence. The illusion of the early pioneer settlement, in which all citizens were of necessity brothers, that did not lack features in common with the Greek city state, is in a measure preserved by a flood of little magazines. The insurance company which at last bullied me into sense, supplements its scheme of parochial visiting

with a kind of parish magazine, in which the moral tales are exactly of the type associated with *Home Words*—only the moral is a different one. The Hydro-Electric Corporation sends out its *News* to tell the man who lightly turns a switch something of the mysteries that lie behind his casual action. It begs him to be careful not to waste electricity because the river has run low; it sounds the 'All clear' that follows heavy rain. Weekly in the street car I am given a little newspaper—red one week and yellow the next—in which the Winnipeg Electric Company records the troubles and trials of 'public transportation.' DO THEY THINK? runs a headline. 'How many of those who drive recklessly or carelessly or who deserve the name of jay-walker, think of the accidents that don't happen? How many of those people think of the street railway employee whose nerves are set on edge many times a day trying to avoid accidents caused by the carelessness of others?'

Economic facts and figures are as freely discussed. You are made to feel that you have been invited on to the board of directors and that it is your fault if the trams don't pay. We're very glad you like our new upholstered seats, they declare. We'd like to do some

more of them. Unfortunately, what with the depression and the taxes and the rest, we simply can't afford it. Sorry, boys. It hurts us more than it does you. ONE SWALLOW DOES NOT MAKE A SUMMER is the wording of another headline.

'While riding a Broadway car one evening last week at about 6 p.m., we heard one of our neighbours on the car say to his friend: "I guess they 're not losing any money on this car," to which observation his friend agreed.

'As a matter of fact, that Broadway car had been a losing proposition that day and every day that week, and every week for a considerable number of weeks. It takes more than one swallow to make a summer, and it takes more than one load to pay the cost of operating a street car twenty hours out of the twenty-four. If our observing friend had got on that car in the morning when it left the car-house and had travelled with it all through the day until it was put back in the early hours of the following morning, he would have found many long stretches and many occasions when the car had one, two, or three passengers and sometimes none.

'There is a mistaken idea that because the

cars are full between 5 and 6 p.m. that the company must be doing a splendid business; but rush-hour traffic is not really profitable. If it were not for rush hours we could dispense with probably one-third of our street cars and buses and the employees required to operate them, and when it is understood that this rush-hour business is for approximately two hours each day, it does not take much figuring to calculate the overhead cost of keeping equipment and employing trainmen for use during this very small portion of the day.'

The logic appears unanswerable; the strap-hanger steps down on to the road with a worried look upon his face. Perhaps he ought not to have travelled by tram after all. It seems a shame to give the company so much trouble.

Yet another service is performed by this very spirited *Public Service News*. It keeps poetry alive in our midst. If Winnipeg is not famous for its poets it is not the fault of the street-car system. Every week the title LIMERICKS is followed by the reassuring news: 'Cheques for \$1 each have been mailed to the authors of the following poems.' The verses that follow are seldom strictly limericks at all. They would not be anthologized by Mr. Langford Reed.

Doubtless they have caused Edward Lear to turn a good few times in his grave. The word 'limerick' has been adopted to describe any verse that is of humorous, semi-humorous, or pseudo-humorous intent. If I sent a triolet to the editor he might give me a dollar for it, but he would be sure to call it a limerick. We are practical men, not purists, on this side of the Atlantic. Nevertheless the verses always rhyme and very often scan, and never fail to extol the street car above all other forms of locomotion.

In glancing o'er the *Service News*,
I find it gives the railway's views,
On the front page it 's the TAXES.
It seems to me in times like these,
That such amounts would make one freeze,
So I suggest the AXES.

That should give the city council pause to think.
And note the graphic description of the following
dollar's worth:

Some people may grumble and sigh for a car,
They forget that the first cost won't carry them far.
I stick to the street car, it 's quick and it 's cheap,
I 've no fear of those bugbears, 'repairs' and 'upkeep.'
I don't have the worry of dodging a 'cop,'
Of watching the signals to 'go' and to 'stop.'
I chat with my friends as we 're speeding along,
And as for expense, why! it 's merely a song.

This is magnificent, and I think that I have solved an age-old mystery. I know who write the verses in the Christmas crackers.

Those who travel swiftly through our land note easily the lack of things that in other places they admire. It is true that our cities yet are not full-grown; our libraries are poor; our art gallery is in its infancy. It is not for me to assess the social influence upon our community of the Church and the University, but I am convinced that the greatest influence of all, greater even than the vaunted influence of the Press and of the talking pictures, is that of our two great shops. It is they that dominate our activities. It is they who decide what we shall wear and how our homes shall be furnished and ornamented. It is beneath their roofs that most things happen. It is their page-wide advertisements, each vying with the other in the Press, that we daily scan, for which alone many of us find it necessary to study the newspapers at all. Their cohorts of beauticians mould the faces of our womenkind and pluck their eyebrows very nearly bare. It is their fashions that must become ours. And their fashions are fleeting as a comic song. A friend of mine sought the stores of this city far and wide for an overcoat of a particular design.

At length a kindly shop assistant divulged to him that it would be useless to search any longer. That design was not being used, that cut had been played out. It must be allowed to rest. In two years' time it would be worked up again. Every one would wear them then. In circumstances such as these one cannot counter the shopkeeper's assertion, 'They are not worn,' with the Olympian reply, 'I wear them.' It is a very difficult thing here to be old-fashioned.

Thus the new arrival is frequently made to feel hopelessly out of date, an immigrant from a really old country. He may want a wooden towel-roller, an honest, solid affair such as he used in the back kitchen of his home. He cannot find one that is not glass. He realizes that England really is a conservative country, one in which men hang on to the fag-ends of earlier civilizations, a place in which some things are never advertised simply because they are taken for granted. In England, I suppose, not many people nowadays use loofahs. They have been ousted by softer, rubbery things. Yet still in every chemist's shop there must hang a few, dry, it may be, and dusty, waiting for the casual, the eccentric purchaser. In Winnipeg the eccentric purchaser has no place in what is regarded as solely an economic

world. Things that pay are stocked, and things that don't pay are got rid of. In our part of Winnipeg the search for the loofah proved as involved almost as the hunting of the snark. At the first drug store to which we made application they told us that they had never heard of any such thing. We described the article in detail. Only an Indian weed, we said, but invaluable in the bath. With unconscious irony they directed us to the nearest hardware store. But that was no good. The nearest thing they had was American steel wool. At a second store there flashed a gleam of hope. They had heard of loofahs. But gosh! they said, they hadn't been asked for one for twenty years. Loofahs! just fancy. They'd see if there was one to be had in the city. After ten days they reported that research was vain. Yet in the end we found one, where we should have begun our search, in the drug department of a monster store. Loofahs, like sugar mice, have gone out of fashion because they are not advertised. Unless they have a strong tradition to guide them, men cease to demand that to which their attention is never called. The loofah, indeed, has never had its due. Even the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* refers to it as 'Pod of *luffa Aegyptiaca*, used as flesh-

brush.' And what, one is tempted to ask, what is a flesh-brush? It sounds like a butcher's implement. There are no loofah slogans. Yet such a slogan might well be invented, even as they have invented slogans for the oranges of Japan. A MAN'S WASH—THE LOOFAH! OR GOT THAT LOOFAH LOOK? But trick such words as these in electric lights to shine by day and night upon a populous thoroughfare (accompanied by an animated sign of the loofah in use as a flesh-brush), and pods of *luffa Aegyptiaca* will sell by the thousand. In return we might find a profitable market for our surplus wheat in the desert fastnesses of Arabia.

Some day a history of the railways of this land will be written which will also be a history of her civilization. As the railways have made and unmade towns, so also do they supply or withhold most of our intellectual stimulation. Ours is a land of wandering prophets, who follow the railway line from coast to coast, stopping at our principal cities to tell us all about Germany or the League of Nations, Moscow under Lenin or Athens under Pericles. There are always three or four of them about, together with musicians, choir-boys, and university debaters, the travelling sophists of to-day. They dodge from place to place,

treading on each other's heels, though rarely meeting each other in the flesh, being enormously applauded and extravagantly interviewed. Whole chains of clubs exist to grab their opinions as they sally by. The club members do little among themselves. Few of them would think of getting up and making speeches. But if any visitor is in town who can be bribed by the offer of a lunch or dinner and the subtle lure of the clapping hand, why, they'll let him say his say. And all these visitors come to Winnipeg. It is impossible to pass across the Dominion by rail without passing through our city. Our secretaries have Argus eyes and an intelligence system extending to the far Maritime Provinces. So we have learnt to be good listeners, and the telephone-bell calls us often to hear the latest bird of passage. We do not expect him to stay with us for very long. We should suspect him if he did. As a very early Christian document has put it: 'He shall stay one day, and, if need be, the next also, but if he stay three he is a false prophet.'¹ We see him on to a sleeping-car upon the train and wish him luck at Saskatoon or Regina. Perhaps we'll encounter him again on his way back. But most probably he's returning through the States.

¹ *Didache* xi. 3.

It is easy to speak of the legacy of the pioneer in the Canada of to-day. But his chief legacy is simply this: more pioneers. Our young men do not see visions very often. But they go and do things that in an older country would seem visionary and wild. I think of the students who read with me and the things that they have done. They have worked as carpenters or on survey parties, or run away from school as far as Colorado. One worked in the kitchen of a restaurant for three years and learnt all the horrors of head cheese. They have been policemen in the summer-time and booksellers in the winter. A couple of them begged leave from their studies for two days because they wished to go electioneering. 'Yes,' I said, mindful of the political activities of my own undergraduate days; 'what party are you supporting?' They looked at me in surprise. Politics did not concern them. That was a folly of their elders. But they were going to earn good dollars as deputy returning officers. Another, a boy of eighteen, discussed with me quite casually on the tram whether or not he should work his way to Japan on a liner in the summer vacation. He had the chance. Should he take it? Or would something else—a lumber camp or surveying party in the north—be more

interesting? As Professor Zimmern has put it: 'To the young American the element of Space is tenfold more real than the element of Time. Brought up in a home where wide distances and large economic opportunities are the staple of conversation, familiar with the telephone and the motor car from his earliest childhood, accustomed to regard this or that activity of school and college in terms of business organization, looking forward to a career in which his eager and wide-ranging mind will find a spacious and congenial field of activity—what is history to him or he to history? His natural element of intellectual discipline is afforded by the sciences of space. He has been a geographer without knowing it from the day on which he first drove a car, and an economist without knowing it from the day on which he first earned a dollar.' These words are true. Young Canadians are deplorable spellers. Many think that to read a book is to master a subject; many think that literature and art constitute the realm of women and of teachers. Nevertheless they are a definite stratum in the salt of the earth because they still are pioneers, because they still are merchant venturers.

BETWEEN THE LAKES

MY chief fear of the Manitoban winter was the fear of immobility. When I was a Londoner I was able, once in every week, to leave the rain of London's streets for the rain of the Chiltern Hills or the North Downs. But in Winnipeg I quickly found that, like Caesar's armies campaigning in Gaul, the citizens enter winter quarters and do not leave them until spring's coming breaks the river's ice and makes floods upon the prairies. The busy pleasure-haunts upon Lake Winnipeg become the resorts of a few fishermen and woodcutters only. The high white switchbacks, that look dangerous as Wembley at its worst, see the season gauntly through. What kind of coat would I need for the winter! I inquired. 'Nothing very heavy,' I was told. 'It isn't as if you 'd be going out much. Just across to the college and back.' It sounded like a six months' doom. Sometimes I would lie awake in bed, listening to the long, low sound of the railway engine's whistle,

so expressive of this long, low land, and wonder whether I should ever be off again.

My heart is warm with the friends I make,
And better friends I 'll not be knowing;
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,
No matter where it 's going.

When there came the offer of a vast fur-lined coat, big enough to hold a man *and* a boy, I took it gladly. It seemed an augury of vagabondage. I could not exactly wear it on my little journeys to the college and back. I might yet wear it on a bobsleigh.

Already, indeed, I had been out of the city. I had watched in late autumn the gulls hovering over the lake, and sought to discover the name of the birds that were so like curlews. I had made my way round the little city of Portage la Prairie; seen the late thrashing of wheat and the burning straw mounds on the Portage plains. I had eaten dinner in a farm-house, where the farmer's children never said a word, but followed the stranger's movements with their eyes as spectators follow the movements of the ball at championship lawn-tennis matches. I felt those children would recognize me again. And then, after Christmas, men came to me and said: Would I go out next week-end, up into the country between the Lakes, to take a

Christmas service? It was a tough town and I'd have to stay in the local hotel. It was a little more than a hundred miles away. I would have to leave Winnipeg on Saturday afternoon and get up before six on Monday morning to catch the one returning train. But, of course, if I wanted to see the country . . . Mentally I tossed my cap high into the air. But I kept my emotion to myself. Yes, I said, I'd go.

Then I began to hear something of the land to which I was going. It was not a good country. It could not be called prairie. It was all bush, poplar mostly, but willow also, tamarack and spruce. There was quite a lot of muskeg up that way. The war had drained its population, and after the war it had been hastily resettled. Ex-soldiers were given plots of land that were half bush and half swamp, and if they escaped the swamp they were faced with an uncountable number of stones. There were not a few deserted homesteads in the country. But some—especially some of the earlier settlers—were more prosperous. They had done well to concentrate on cows. And chickens clucked to no small purpose up the line.

My friends were all surprised to hear about

my mission. It was a tough place, they all agreed. I only hoped I wouldn't look too silly when I got there. I know very little about cows. I didn't want to be caught out as I was once in Winnipeg. With a couple of English friends I visited the Grain Exchange. We stood in the gallery and listened to the brokers giving tongue. Only by the direct intervention of Providence did it seem possible that out of all this racket there emerged man's daily bread. We tried to understand what it was all about. We failed. Then, in the lift, descending, a man turned to me and said:

'Well, and how 's the market to-day?'

'I'm afraid I am not competent to judge,' I replied, marvelling that I should be mistaken for a grain broker.

'Is it up or down?' he continued menacingly. I was very glad when we reached the ground floor.

No, I did not want to be caught out. But I had sure confidence in my coat that had braved many winters on another and a stouter man's back and had been defeated by nothing except the moth. A Hudson's Bay Company's circular, calling attention to a sale of overcoats—or rather, o'coats—advertised 'types for shorts, tall, stouts, and semi-stouts.' The

man for whom this overcoat was made was no mere semi-stout.

Yet somehow, at the small suburban railway station, my stout overcoat and fur cap seemed rather out of place. The waiting passengers who crowded round the stove—for the day was cold—hardly seemed toughs at all. They were young and feminine, well powdered and gaily dressed. I could not make them out.

The train drew in with ringing bell, and we clambered on to it. Soon we left the city, and, looking back, could see it as something of a unity, though it quickly faded away upon the plain. The sun shone brightly and the snow was gleaming. The engine's thick smoke cast a deep blue shadow that was constantly retreating and yet constantly renewed. We steamed across a clear white sea relieved by dull islands of brushwood, by wart-like rocks of straw, and by red barns. Sometimes we stopped at villages where frozen washing flapped upon a line or frozen fishes hung by their gills upon a stick. The young ladies on the train turned out to be school teachers returning to their country tasks after a week of jollification in the city. They changed the whole place into a kind of family party as they strolled about and compared their experiences of dances

and of films. We dropped them up and down the line. They formed a barrier between the land and barbarism, one of very few. The barrier did not seem very strong. But I had no doubt that it held securely.

It was dark before I reached my destination, and I was a little afraid that I should be carried past the station and deposited purposeless at 'the end of steel'. But at length the trainman came perambulating by, chatting with his friends and calling out that my station was the next. Here a large friendly figure (a semi-stout I would suppose) greeted me and led me out across the snow. He said he'd show me the way to the boarding-house. I noticed later that although everybody else called the establishment an hotel, though it was so named above the door, though it boasted an adjacent beer parlour, my friend referred to it always as the boarding-house. Perhaps he had a grudge against the proprietor and meant to take him down a peg or two. Perhaps he did not like beer parlours and sought to slur over their noxious presence. Or perhaps it was because he was an Old Timer and clung to an earlier usage. So did the Old Timers in my part of London persistently call Great Portland Street by the name of Portland Road.

At any rate I was soon inside. It was a wooden building, heated by a wood-burning stove near the entrance. Tamarack logs stood by in readiness and the housekeeper later expatiated to me upon their excellence. The logs were about three feet long; the tin chimneys of these stoves—the stove-pipes—radiate a deal of heat as they go winding through the house. But if you tend such a stove as this you swiftly become its slave, for when the weather is cold you must get up in the night to stoke it. I passed by the stove, around which a few men, presumably toughs, were sitting, and mounted to my room where a loud-ticking alarm-clock had been ominously set in preparation for Monday morning. Then I came down to supper.

I found the dining-room without difficulty. There was a lady there—I deduced correctly that she was also a school teacher—having supper too, but she proved uncommunicative. She sat at one end of a large oilclothed table, I towards the other end. I tried to make movements towards conversation by passing bread and water, salt and pepper and the like. She said, 'Thank you,' more often she said, 'No, thank you,' and she said nothing else. I must have been looking tough.

But the table merits something of a description. It was, as I say, oilclothed. American cloth really is American cloth. You meet it everywhere. Some kindred substance even makes smelly bindings for school books so that they remind one rather of a wash-hand stand than of a scholar's desk. In the centre of the table were artificial roses set in a vase of the early Woolworth period. Surrounding them, like the towers and ramparts of a Norman castle, were many pickles; an enormous bottle of pickled tomatoes; two bottles of tomato ketchup; one bottle of Worcestershire sauce, not the usual brand, but the imitation, no doubt, of which one is so often bid beware; a jar of 'prepared mustard,' and a bottle of vinegar; the whole edifice being flanked with toothpicks and a press-bell. There were enough condiments to make any meal palatable, after a fashion. Slabs of meat, like brown, muddy tiles, were set ready for an experiment that I dreaded to attempt. But soon I was brought baked lake fish, and this I enjoyed; also *sauté* potatoes. Scattered around the table were glass containers of sugar, jugs of milk, mugs containing spoons, bread and butter in Canadian profusion, and, in front of me, a little dish that held three stewed figs. These I funk'd, eating cake instead.

The men around the stove were silent still, the hotel-keeper had little to say, and I had no desire to explore the town in the chill and dark. So up I went to light the lamp and listen to the steady ticking of the clock. For a while I read, for a while I wrote a letter. At nine o'clock I went to bed.

In the morning I awoke to find the place to which I had come. It was strange a little later to hear the farmers from the surrounding country refer to it as 'town.' Towns can be very little in this country, and this was a very little town. But the *differentia* of a town in the country between the Lakes is to possess a bank and a creamery. These it certainly had, and it ran to an agricultural show in the summer. It had a railway station also with a daily train either way, and three or four stores. A man at breakfast told me where I might find a shed full of frozen fish. Surrounding the town, beyond the cleared fields, as the sea surrounds an island, was the poplar bush, illimitable to the eye, all feathery with hoar frost and glistening in the sun. Yet the town's most noticeable feature was the corded piles of firewood, at every turning and in every open space, more common even than miniature golf courses had been the previous summer in the

vacant lots of Winnipeg. The place seemed barricaded, buttressed for a siege. Which indeed it was. Only the enemy was winter.

Soon I found my little wooden church, which already stood open, in which early that morning some good man had lit a fire. The farmers and their wives and children, thirty to forty of them, came trooping in, a little breathless from driving, clad in heavy coats no whit more light than mine; many had driven a considerable distance for the rare opportunity of worship. Then when all was finished, and I had shaken hands, I think, with every one, a lady asked me whether I would go home to dinner with them. Her husband had met me at the train the night before. He was bringing the bobsleigh round at the moment.

This was not the 'sports model' that a participator in Alpine sports might expect, but the sled-of-all-work round about the farm, a long wooden box on two pairs of runners. There was straw laid in the box and an assortment of rugs also. On these we sat cross-wise, the farmer's wife, the daughters big and little, yet another school teacher and myself. Soon I found myself participating for the first time in a scene that I expect to see very often in Canada: the driving away from

church in winter in the country. There was a jingle of harness and of bells. Cutters and bobsleighs went in succession down the road in merry style. Perhaps Zechariah had in mind a scene like this when he prophesied that there should be upon the bells of the horses, 'Holiness unto the Lord.' Down the road we went, through the town and over the bridge. Yet soon we were calling out farewells. The members of our little cavalcade diverted each to his own way. The road was our own.

Quickly we left behind the main, cleared space of the town, though often we came to other cleared patches in the bush. There were poplars everywhere, broken sometimes by spruce. The driver pointed out to me the landmarks that we passed: a school, a fairly prosperous farm, a farm that had been abandoned. The little girl beside me pointed out the prairie chickens and partridges that arose in considerable numbers from the bush. I was shown a place where her father once had shot a jumping deer. There was some talk of wolves. The school teacher asked my small neighbour how much she had earned from snaring rabbits that season. Twenty-five cents, she said, but there was no demand for skins this winter. Her father interjected that the depression had

hit her hardly. You only got five cents each for them. So that was how little girls of twelve years old amused themselves in winter in the country up between the Lakes.

The farm-house, when we reached it, was not itself very big, and the first inhabitant that greeted us from within was a bandaged hen. But there was a great array of surrounding buildings. Soon I met another daughter and two sons, and we sat down, nine of us, to a midday meal. And when we had drunk our cups of tea, and sat for a while beside the stove, and discussed, if the truth must be told, *Les Misérables*, which one of the sons was reading, my host asked me whether I would like a walk around the place. The snow was deep, so I'd better put on my overshoes; and my overcoat as well. If we were lucky we might see a jumping deer.

We stopped for a moment in the outer room, where the hen with the sprained ankle was still painfully perambulating round, to look at skins. These were not the five-cent rabbit skins, but more valuable trappings, ermine skins, turned inside out. I did not count the guns upon the walls. There must have been nine at least. This was the sort of house I dreamed of as a boy. It was a house that my host himself had

made. In the ceiling he pointed out to me the redder tamarack beams, the whiter spruce. He remembered even where he had cut the trees, twenty-two years ago. Twenty-two years ago he and his wife had set out from Portage la Prairie with two oxen. The journey north had taken them two weeks, for there were no railways then in the country between Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba. But at last they had come to the place that was marked on the surveyor's map as theirs. They had settled to and built their house. I could see it still, that original house, though it was now an inconspicuous barn. They had no capital to speak of in those first days. But now it seemed to me that they had a great establishment; barns and sheds surrounded the house on all sides. I was constantly being introduced to fresh cows and fresh pigs. There seemed nothing in the place my cicerone had not made. He had made the house and he had made the radio—the first radio in all that country, and what a stir it had made when it was first assembled! He had made the barns and he had made the bobsleigh that carried us from church, the cutter that was to take me back in the evening; for he had been a metal-worker in the Old Country. An engine humming in a

little shed of its own seemed the only thing he had not put together. He had laid the physical foundations both of the church and of the school. Now he was churchwarden and chairman of the school board. As I listened to his talk I began to enter into the meaning of the strange Canadian phrase 'making good.' The Dominions are popularly known in England as places to which younger sons are sent in order to make good. Nobody quite knows what this making good implies. It is a thing that can be done in Canada or in Australia or in Kenya or in the half-world of the cinema; in an older world it is a process quite unknown. Just as in December one wishes everybody a merry Christmas, so is every emigrant from Great Britain encouraged by the hope that he will make good. I know. Innumerable people, who hardly said good morning to me in the street, as soon as they heard that I was going to Canada, said they hoped that I would make good. I did not know what they meant. Nor did they. It was the obvious thing to say, that was all. But now I understood. This man, who pointed out the pigs and cows, who gave the calves warm water to drink, this man had made good. He had brought three sons into the world, and three daughters, to carry

on the work. One son was in business down east. Two were working on the farm, though one of them went farther west in harvest-time to earn good wages as an engine-man. One daughter was a school teacher, lately returned from Saskatchewan. One hoped shortly to enter the Normal School—and the terror of her approaching examinations cast its shadow across the house. But the third was more occupied with rabbit skins than with examinations.

We saw horses. We saw cows. We saw calves. We saw a shed full of frozen fish, which at the moment happened to be the cheapest chicken food. (I wondered: would the eggs taste fishy? But I did not dare to ask.) We saw chickens, all approved with the agricultural inspector's mark. We saw pigs. We saw turkeys. We saw geese. Everywhere you go in Canada the prime subject of discussion these days, and the most natural subject, is the depression. Every one tells you how every one has been hit by it, and indeed they speak the truth. But my guide mentioned the depression only to say that he was less hit by it than most men. He had no grain to speak of, but the cows loved the rough, woody country into which he was now leading me. They liked to muck about in it. And they were

mucking about pleasantly in a shelter, lightly constructed of green spruce boughs. 'We're practically self-supporting out here,' was the gist of the conversation. 'If they don't buy our things, we've plenty to eat.' Here on the farm they had their own poultry, eggs, and butter. It was a very different place from the great farms of the prairie that specialize in grain alone. Here they had bacon and honey of their own; they did not sell these things, but used them in the house. They had turkeys for high days and holidays, and I heard tales of a giant New Year goose. It was not a farm. It was a commonwealth.

We did not see a jumping deer. We did not even see a rabbit's bobbing tail, though we saw many tracks. We walked and stumbled deep into the snow. We found the stump of the largest tree that had been hauled from the place, the stumps also of smaller trees cut to satisfy the papermaker's eager maw. And it was good to see spruces of a reasonable size after the silvan scragginess of the Red River Valley. Partridges and prairie chicken started up at our approach; on a branch there twittered pine grosbeaks, greater cousins of the sparrow with a hint of the robin's breast. And when we returned to the house the strain of Blake's

Jerusalem resounded irrelevantly from the radio. They were singing it somewhere down Toronto way. But nobody paid any attention to it.

A light caboose, that is, a small covered sled, had drawn up in the farmyard, and its driver was within. The talk was all of the country-side, of drainage and depressions and of the stock of bulls, of the ice fisherman's unremunerative employment, of cutters overturned and motor cars held up on the road. 'And do you think I could move that car? No, sir!' was the constantly recurring formula that lent emphasis to our visitor's tales. With supper over he was gone. We rose to watch the gay caboose set out upon its six-mile journey home. And conversation grew less practical, more philosophic. I learnt, indeed, how far the vocabulary of philosophy can travel. My host described a man he knew, a man who lacked the understanding needful for his work. 'There's a phrase we used to use in the Old Country,' he said. 'I don't know whether you know it. It just about describes him. He hasn't got any nous.' Yes, I told him, it was a very Old Country word. And Plato would have understood it too.

Meanwhile there had been produced, not the family album, but the family photographs. I

wish they had been in an album, for chronological arrangement would have simplified their message. They were not arranged. They were all anyhow. Yet they formed an illuminating commentary on pioneer life. I saw the first farm-house (when it was still a house and not a barn), the family's first children, the neighbourhood's first agricultural show, the heifer that won the cup in 1922. There is a phrase in Canada, to 'talk Old Country.' It does not necessarily imply to talk about England. I have heard of a famous visiting lecturer who, thinking he had acquired the argot of the land, inquired at a post office how much it would cost to send a parcel to the Old Country, only to be met with the laconic question: 'Which Old Country?' But we were both Englishmen and our talk was all of England. After a while we began to talk Old Country with a vengeance. For the subject strayed to cricket, and this strong farmer in the northern wilds reeled off accounts of all the important cricket matches he had ever watched. The family sat back amazed and delighted. Their father had not had a chance of such a field day for years. There is little true understanding of cricket in the country between the Lakes. He did not only remember the matches. He remembered

the names of all the players. Nor was that all. He knew who had taken the wickets, how the stumper had fared, roughly how many runs each player had made. Innings followed innings on into the night. We talked freely, as do those for whom Lee and Perrin are not the makers only of a sauce. I sought to compete with the tales of the great innings that I had also seen, the innings played by the present Lord Tennyson against the Australians at Headingley, when his hand was split between finger and thumb; when Hobbs had appendicitis. I set up the figures of Hammond and Rhodes against his mighty shades of Grace. I diverted talk of Ranjitsinhji by mention of his nephew. But I could not really compete. I left him master of the field.

The night was cold when the cutter was drawn out. But the stars shone well and the land was still with beauty. We drove gaily into town over the slithery road, passing one other cutter on our way, and roaring out our greetings. In the morning the train came very early. But I caught it.

COCOA PARTY

'If you 're going down town,' said my wife, 'you might as well buy some balloons. The Boys' Missionary Club are coming in to tea—I mean cocoa.'

It was as she said. When I returned with my balloons, and retired into the background to blow them up, I found a good lady—a friend of the boys—stirring vigorously a thick brown mush in a big enamelled bowl. It was the cocoa. And somehow the whole thing seemed unspeakably gross, the kind of thing I hardly liked to encourage in my house, at any rate. A tea-party without tea; I was used to that. But always it had been understood in our household that if you weren't big enough for tea you had milk, if you were too big for milk you had tea (or, on very special occasions, ginger-pop). Such apparently was not the Winnipeg tradition, at least not the tradition of the Boys' Missionary Club. This is the land where all things are nutritious, so that great bruisers of men will tell you that they have

been fed since infancy on milk and porridge. But a tea-party with cocoa—that cocoa there, thick and sticky in the bowl—ugh! It nearly put me off my balloons.

The boys did not share my aesthetic susceptibilities. At least, they all had two cups. But few of them went beyond that. They did not clamour for thirds and fourths, as they might have done with tea. For, as my nursemaid told me years and years ago, tea and coffee are stimulants, but cocoa is a food. And that is practically the whole truth of the matter. We smile indulgently upon Dr. Johnson's thirteen cups of tea. We imagine how it must have stimulated the conversation. But we should be more inclined to burn his *Dictionary* publicly at the street corner did Boswell record of him that he drank thirteen cups of cocoa. Yet there is no need for us to imagine any such monster. Cocoa does not tempt towards the thirteenth cup.

And cocoa, taken in moderation, is always looked upon as virtuous. It has solid body-building qualities that are hardly inferior to those of cod-liver oil. Its name is listed in those strange tables where half a tablespoonful of So-and-so's extract of Something or other is made the equivalent of fourteen eggs or a

couple of pounds of prime steak. One can almost picture the confirmed cocoa-drinker. He avoids getting into draughts. He wears woollens next his skin. He smokes a patent pipe. He wears boots rather than shoes. He washes his hands with carbolic soap. He subscribes to innumerable charities and makes a nuisance of himself at as many meetings. Sometimes, in the coma of the third cup, he writes letters to the newspapers. He is for ever talking about his conscience and his duty. Cocoa is indeed essentially a duty drink. That is why I was so depressed that the boys should choose to drink it at a party. Had their missionary interest brought them as low as that?

Not only is cocoa a virtuous drink. It is made by virtuous people. The public knows little about the dispensers of coffee and tea, except that the late Sir Thomas Lipton was a great sportsman and a great loser. But the very word 'cocoa' carries a bouquet of Gladstonian Liberalism and welfare work, of garden cities and model factories. Are not the great cocoa merchants the great also (if greatness is reckoned in such a body) of the Society of Friends? Yet when you have reached the names you have ended with the matter. You

do not know where your cocoa-beans were grown. There is no classification into Ecuador or Brazil, Cameroons or the Dutch East Indies. The discriminating tea-drinker contrasts his India with his China, his Darjeeling with his Orange Pekoe, Lapsang Souchong, or Bohea. Strange tales are told of the travels of tea before finally it reaches the cup to be commented on, in its last moments, by the inquisitive lady. But I have heard of no variety of cocoa brought by caravan across the steppes of Russia nor read an advertisement for a skilled interpreter of cocoa sediment. Your coffee-drinker, if he knows what he is about, will blend his Mocha with his Costa Rica or Mysore, will babble even of Blue Mountain Jamaica. Yet the only classification of cocoa that I know was the dreary war-time regulation holding sway in Great Britain which instructed that all tins or packets of cocoa be labelled either Grade A or Grade B. So far as I can remember there was no Grade C. Ultimately there were only two varieties, the good and the bad. And I have never met a man—not a male nurse, even—who blended his own cocoa.

Yet cocoa must have its underworld, like any other commodity that is bought or sold. Somewhere dark men toil for cocoa. Mr.

Somerset Maugham and the author of *White Cargo* might well explore the dramatic possibilities of cocoa. I seem to remember that a chapter in one of Mr. H. W. Nevinson's books of memoirs was entitled 'The Cocoa Scandal.' And a Manchester silk merchant once told me that the whole being of his trade depended upon the price of cocoa. They were not very good silks that he sold. But they were bright and caught the eye. Especially did they catch the eye of natives along the west coast of Africa. If the price of cocoa was good they would come in from the long grass to sell their cocoa-beans (or is it nibs?) and buy the bright new silks from England. If the price of cocoa was low they just didn't bother. But they caused palpitations in Manchester.

Tea and coffee beyond the third cup are looked upon as innocent vices. Black coffee is regarded as intellectual, and half our younger novelists sing a song of samovars. We have tea-time, some lazy folk have coffee-time, but cocoa-time is only heard of at break in preparatory schools and at bedtime in women's colleges. Yet it is all a matter of names. But call your cup of cocoa a cup of chocolate and your whole mental image is changed. You forget all about Gladstonian Liberalism and body-

building qualities. Cocoa is taking a holiday and is having her fling. She has left her thick petticoats behind and goes gaily down Paris streets. This morning she is in the Rue de Rivoli. And to-night? To-night she may even visit the Folies Bergères.

A DAY'S DRIVE

'BE sure to bring the thickest coat you have,' the rector wrote, 'as we shall have to do thirty miles' driving between the points on Sunday.' The letter came to me at the end of January. It was obviously a case for my heavy coat. My wife also was to go with me into the country, though she was not to travel 'between the points.' We looked fit pioneers when we joined the other passengers—mostly Icelanders—upon the evening train. As a matter of fact, it was not very cold. But we were taking no chances. It was a journey of little more than thirty miles from the city, and it was speedily accomplished, but it was a journey into a different world. Again we found ourselves outside the narrow ribbon of industrialism in a land of poplar bush, where men thought more of cows than bulls or bears. It is true that the driver of the car that was to carry us two miles to the rectory called out 'Taxi!' when we embarked. But there was obviously something gleeful, something un-

usual in the call. He was a child playing a part. The local school seemed big enough and well enough built for any city in the world, but when we stopped at one of the two village stores to lay in supplies I knew how far our small journey had brought us. And when we drew up at the rectory I saw what in this land I had often longed to see but seldom seen. I saw a hill. It was not very big as hills go, seven feet high exactly, we were later told, but it was quite steep. 'You 'll find the house,' our driver informed us, 'behind that snow-pile. You can walk over it. It 's quite hard.' We climbed the hill and descended to the hospitable house beyond.

The rector told us that he had suffered much from the snow that winter. Despite the surrounding bush, never far distant in this part of the country, his house was singularly unprotected. That hill in front, for instance. He had never known anything like it before. At first he had accepted its impassability. He and his family must go round another way to the road. But he grew tired of doing that. So he poured water on the snowdrift and made a frozen path across its height. He had had hill-climbing enough for one winter. His wood-pile also had served to catch the snow.

Every day he had to go out with his spade and mine for his fuel.

But it was comfortable within, beside the stove and round the supper table. Our host had originally invited a number of guests from the four quarters of his very extensive parish. But unfortunately one of his parishioners was ill, and as nearly all of them were related to one another, hardly any could come. This was an old settlement. These were the descendants of the Selkirk settlers and of Hudson's Bay officials. The only guests besides ourselves that in the end arrived were a farmer and his mother from six miles away. I say a farmer and his mother. I might as accurately have said a farmer and her son. For she was a lady who had been widowed young in England and had come out to Canada with three small boys. She had worked on the land from the first, but now the small boys all were men, and two of them had farms of their own. The mother could rest a little, and help in church work. But she still looked after the chickens. Our talk again was all of the country-side, of cattle and horses and of forty degrees below zero, and of that inexhaustible Canadian topic, 'the early days.' We discussed a neighbouring settlement where the men were like the sons

of Anak, each of them weighing two hundred pounds apiece. We heard of the old school-house that had been turned into a community hall, of the chicken supper to be held next week, and together we wondered whether they could afford the services of the accordion-player for a coming dance. Then mother and son, farmers both, harnessed up their horses and jingled off into the night.

A few weeks earlier I had learnt the implications of 'making good.' So now I learnt the meaning of the universal American word 'chores.' Six months earlier I might have imagined that a chore boy was but a male variety of chorus girl. Now I knew better. Before he went to bed the rector had to pile high his stove with wood. He had to go wandering off into the bush with a bucket, because the water in his well was brackish. (He told me that the well needed new cribbing; I pretended to understand what he meant.) In the small hours he got up to see to the stove again—we felt our bedroom suddenly grow hot. With the dawn he was at it, wood-mining in the snow. And when that was done he started melting snow to form soft water for the baby's bath.

The Manitoban poplar, black or white, is

not a very great tree. It grows to no large height. Its trunks are often thickly set together to form an almost impassable woodland, but they themselves are usually astonishingly thin—stems rather than trunks. It is of little use for timber, being very soft, and if grown in marshy places, liable to rot within. It makes a poor fence-post, for the very same reason. It fetches low prices as fuel, though it is burnt a great deal, being, in many parts of the country, the only fuel that is available at all. It can be used for log houses, but for this purpose it is far inferior to spruce; a man will haul spruce logs fifteen miles rather than use the poplar standing on his own new land. It is our commonest tree, and the poplar leaf might well serve for a provincial emblem. But it is a poor tree; it is accounted nothing in the land. No less it has a glory all its own. No tree appears more lovely, white with the hoar frost of the morning. It was for us as if we had gone to sleep in the valley of dry bones and awoken to find that they all were flesh and blood. Every tree was awake, alive, and aglitter. They lined the horizon; they reached down to the little church where I was to preach that night. It was a glad sight from the window, and it brought us quickly downstairs.

My host had a primitive Ford car tucked away behind the house. It needed a couple of new tyres, he said, and half a new engine. At any rate it was no use in winter. There were places upon the road, I would find, that no car would be able to pass, where even a Rolls-Royce would be defeated. In the winter he hired. The man with the cutter should be round soon. He had ordered him good and early, because the folk in this part of the world had no sense of time. Still, we 'd better be getting ready. The calculations turned out to have been exactly made. The cutter arrived exactly when it was required. It was drawn by one horse only, instead of the expected two. But it was the best horse in the stable, so we were assured, a frisky youngster that enjoyed its work; we should be there in good time. The horse's driver came from the district where no man weighs less than a couple of hundred pounds (the English reader must do his own arithmetic) and there hardly looked to be room for the three of us in the little open sled. But we put our cases beneath the seat and squeezed in. There was warmth in propinquity. Soon we were driving briskly along the road.

To understand a journey on the roads of Western Canada it is necessary to understand

something of the way in which the country has been surveyed. The old Red River lots were planned in narrow strips extending from the river frontage, a system that looks back to the *côtes* of New France, and beside the river this archaic system has not been disturbed. But the rest of the land has been surveyed on a regular square form. The primary surveyor's unit, as I suppose it might be called, is the township. This consists of a square that measures six miles either way. It is divided into thirty-six sections of a square mile each. Certain of these sections are usually reserved as public, school, or railway lands. Some farmers possess a whole section, some more, but most have a quarter section only. Purloined firewood is sometimes said to be taken from section 37. Men come to have this chess-board pattern in their minds. Manitobans may have little sense of time. They have an exact sense of distance. Journeys are reckoned as seven miles to the north and eleven to the west. At every mile there is a road allowance, a potential road. The triangle has been almost banished from the land. Only beside the river are there winding roads, and beside the railway diagonal ones. Men can travel as a castle on a chess-board but not as a bishop or a knight. Roads run north and

south and east and west, hardly ever north-west or south-west. On the northward roads, to show that Mercator's projection was not really correct, at every twelve miles there are jerks, correction lines so called, that fit the rectangular surveying of man to the indubitable rotundity of the earth's surface. A Manitoban road map has the appearance of a geometrical demonstration.

So we travelled first of all two and a quarter miles to the south, to the village where we had bought the eggs the night before, at which we had left the train, then three miles to the west. So far we traversed the local municipal roads. They had been partially cleared, but there was firm, deep snow for the cutter, and on the western journey we crossed a deep snowdrift that would certainly form a barrier for a car, bechained and energetic though it might be. This land had originally been bush, and in many places it was so still. But in many other places it had been cleared; wide fields testified to many years of work. I was glad of the bush. I learned to understand the benison of a wind-break, why Arbor Day is observed on the 4th May each year for the planting of trees upon the prairie. A brisk north wind was blowing. We felt it already as we crossed the

open spaces. We knew that we should feel it more strongly later on.

The first two turns brought us to the Government highway that leads from Winnipeg to the lake, and here we turned south. ('Highway' is a word that in England is becoming decayed and literary, but in Canada it is in a fine state of preservation, and has a quite technical significance.) The majestic motor snow-plough, that casts snow and stones far from it, so that men run quickly out of its way for fear of a blackened eye, had obviously been along the road quite recently. It was a very good road for a motor car, but it was a poor road for a sleigh. The gravel crunched beneath the runners, and often we found it best to leave the actual road altogether and skirt along its side. Soon beside the road we saw a succession of iron shields that sought to instil consideration and good manners into the speeding motorists going by in summer to the lake. SPEED OFTEN IS FATAL, they warned; LEARN TRAFFIC LAWS, they implored; STOP THE GLARE, they commanded; TEST YOUR BRAKES, they advised—and the phrases went jingling through my head. In winter-time they seemed a little out of place, standing there in the snow, though actually one motor did go past us, speeding

northwards towards the lake. But for the rest the road was ours.

Three and a half miles to the south our horse drew up. Here was, not the church, but the school we sought, standing among a little group of log farm buildings. The horse was led away to stable; we joined the little group that warmed itself by the big stove in the schoolroom. We improvised an altar out of the school desk and the school's Union Jack. (Every school flies one of these in term-time.) We waited five minutes for the organist to arrive. We were warned in a huge whisper that one of the congregation had a tremendous voice and would drown all the rest, so we'd better sing up. It seemed to be the regular formula: 'You've got to sing up to-day. Miss So-and-so is here.' Soon the service had begun, and they seemed more truly worshippers in the little schoolroom, with children's pictures lining all the walls, than many in towering naves and famed cathedrals. The service ended, and the room that had been a church became a club. Around the stove the local gossip all was told. And it was some time before the building was locked up and the horses jingled away.

The log cabin near by, into which we

repaired for lunch, was not quite the rough-hewn affair of the backwoods that lurks in every cinema fan's imagination. It had been plastered over and whitewashed. But it was one of the tiniest houses into which I have ever been. - Half a dozen times since then I have passed it on the road, as I speeded northwards towards the lake; each time it has surprised me by its smallness. For within we did not seem crowded. We found space to hang our coats, and there were seats for eight of us at the least. A little ladder led to sleeping quarters aloft. And somewhere 'off stage' the cooking had been done.

The joint of meat seems to have been banished from the farm-houses of Manitoba. The carving all is done in the kitchen. So we passed our plates to be filled from the dish of meat set before the head of the table. He was an oldish man, born in these parts. His ancestry traced back to the Selkirk settlers of the early nineteenth century. But he belonged to what is called a native family. I could see that his ancestry traced back also to those who occupied the land before Lord Selkirk's name was heard of or ever a shot resounded on the plains. For the Indian lurks still along the river valley and to the north. His colour

flickers here and there in our white company. His face stands out as plainly as from an illustrated edition of *The Last of the Mohicans*. His feathers and bright colours have gone, though still there are places where you may find them. Here he is but a memory, a memory preserved in a look, a gait that never came from Scotland, an aversion from change and from the mechanical progress of to-day.

Our host had not made a fortune on his farm. He had not bothered to build himself a bigger house. He had just jogged along, raising horses mainly, and selling them sometimes if a sale was easily come by. Yet he had a motor car that was the terror of the district. His reputation was that of being the slowest talker and the fastest driver between Selkirk and the Pole. While we ate our meal he did not talk very much. I suppose he was sizing me up. I was beginning to learn that they have a way of doing this on Manitoban farms. But when the toothpicks were passed round he began. And though the rector knew we ought soon to be on our way, we could not go. We had to listen till the tale was told.

Our driver set him off with tales of what, in a more sophisticated society, would be known

as kleptomania; of a law-abiding farmer in particular, a dweller in time past some miles away, whose passion was for his neighbour's buggy whips. 'He must have had forty there in his barn.' Then our host took up the challenge. He had a better tale to tell. It was the story of a stolen bridle, a bridle worked in coloured leathers and fine metals, as dear to him as was the coat of many colours to Joseph. This was a tale that might have been told in any agricultural country at any time in history. Joseph himself might have listened to it with attention and noticed few alien features in its telling. As it was told I realized how early chronicles of legend and of history had been preserved. Often I had heard of the remarkable memory of primitive man; now I was seeing it in action. The teller of the tale could neither write nor read, but every detail of the story was recounted, the year, the time of year, the weather, and what he had said to his wife when he got up that morning. Not one of these details seemed to be invented. Each bore the indubitable stamp of recollected truth. And I have no doubt that the story-teller's sons, who had heard it all before, could repeat it as circumstantially as he did. It was destined to be handed on in the family from generation to

generation. The bridle was stolen by a dastardly Icelfander (I was surprised at this, for Icelfanders are greatly respected in this land); it was recovered by stealth and a due process of law. But it took nearly an hour to recover—the chronicler seemed lord of all time—and we were almost in despair of ever leaving the house at all. But at last it was returned; the villain was punished. ‘Well, we must be going,’ said the rector. ‘Tell my friend one of your duck-shooting stories when he’s round here again. See you next week.’ And off we went.

The day, which had begun so brightly, was now turned dull and drear. The whole sky was one long continuous cloud, like the pall that hangs over London through so many winter days. We discussed the possibility of snow but pronounced against it. We had time, indeed, to discuss half heaven and earth as we drove twelve miles northwards against the stiff cold wind. But our conversation did not soar. It remained soundly bucolic. ‘That’s Sam’s place over there, isn’t it? Have you heard how his pigs are getting on?’ Almost all the names of settlements in this part are derived either from natural features or from the names of settlers—who may still be living. It is

quite possible to travel to Johnson, shall we say, and to be introduced to the grand old man of the settlement, Mr. Johnson himself. Names which in England might be inscribed only in the fading memory of contemporaries or in a family Bible may here be handed down to posterity as the names of districts, of villages or towns. This hope is, strangely enough, seldom held out to the prospective emigrant from Europe. Manitoba has its Poplar Point, its Steep Rock, and its Stony Mountain. It has its French names, Lac du Bonnet, Beausejour, its Indian Winnipeg and Winnipegosis, its Icelandic Gimli, its absurdly bombastic Crystal City, Rapid City, and Dominion City, its literary Emerson, its rather obvious Snowflake, its railwaymen's Transcona, its statesmanlike Gladstone. (Though a dweller in this last place has informed me that the town only gets its name at second hand from the statesman; obtaining it at first hand from a horse owned by a settler in 'the early days.') Somewhere in Saskatchewan, I believe, Kendal jostles between Warsaw and Montmartre. There, too, you will find along the railway a lengthy string of writers: Blewett, Cullen, Lampman, Browning, Willmar, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Cowper, Service, Ryerson—it indicates a literary taste

with a distinctly nationalist bias. Yet other writers there may have been whose settlements have not prospered. Perhaps the land around Shakespeare was so poor that the name disappeared from the map. Who knows? Froude is there too, and Kipling, bearing witness to the learning of the prairies. All these names you will find in the West, along with the comic Napinka and the incredible Medicine Hat. But a glance at the map reminds you that Manitoba has also its Rhodes (but is there a classical allusion here?), Findlay, Morris (but he was a poet too), Hodgson, Russell (surely not founded on the firm basis of unyielding despair?), Erikson, Howden, Cameron, Lauder (Sir Harry has also his admirers), Cartwright, Hargrave, and MacGregor. I like to think that this last is named after Beatrix Potter's immortal villain, but I cannot in any way be sure. The place to which we were going had originally been called after an earlier settler; but since his was a monosyllabic name they had added the terrible suffix -ville. Now, however, the school board had stepped in and given to their school a name that was entirely different. Nobody knew what to call the place. But it gave them something to talk about. And we talked about

it for a very considerable time as we grew colder on our journey north.

At last we came to the landmark we had been seeking, a line of spruce planted as a wind-break, and giving the impression, from a distance, of one single big tree. In this land of poplar bush and miserable willow it stood out for miles around. We passed the farm of those with whom we had had dinner the night before—and discussed their horses. We passed the new neat school and the older one that the adventurous spirits of the neighbourhood had taken over as a community hall. We reached the spruces and swung half a mile to the west. Another disused school had here been turned into a church. The men of the district had buckled to and supplied it with a chancel, the smallest that I have ever seen. There is a diocese in the West, I am told, where all the churches are built upon the same plan. You can see them from the train as you go by. They have the same square, wooden tower, the same white-painted boards. It is not so in the diocese of Rupert's Land. Here we have the most glorious diversity that the minds of settlers could devise. Some churches are built of stone, but most are wooden. Some have pulpits, some have very rickety pulpits,

some have no pulpits at all. Some have vestries; in some the clergy robe in the back pew. Some have stained-glass windows; in some plain windows have been masked by paper patterns. Some are well founded, in others the foundations sag; you go downhill to the chancel. This was a tiny church which now we had reached, our ears cold from the wind, but it was neat and pleasant. The harmonium led the singers gaily on. Yet when we arrived it seemed more like an agricultural show to which we had come. Thirteen cart-horses were tethered outside the church, and all the various sleighs, by whose means the congregation had assembled.

After the service we signed the register in the back pew of the church. It was the usual kind of register. I put down my name and my text. But I noticed that the rector set down something after me in the book, in a column headed 'Remarks.' 'Do these remarks apply to the sermon?' I felt obliged to inquire. For I saw that for the last six Sundays, when he had been the preacher, the remark set down was 'fine,' whereas opposite my name he had put the very ambiguous word 'windy.' But he set my conceit at rest by turning over the page, so that I discovered that often when he

had preached it had been cloudy and sometimes snowy.

The worshippers would have pressed us to stay with them, but our day was not yet done. We must travel speedily for evensong and for a meal at the rectory. Our single horse was going very well. We regained the main road and drove five miles upon it again to the south. We noticed that a Swedish settler was getting on pretty well, clearing out the roots from his land. Then we turned to journey three miles to the east. This was a very lonely road. It sounded even more lonely as they told me of a German settler in the bush somewhere to our south. At least they thought he was there in the bush. He hadn't been seen for months. Except in the absolute vicinity of our stopping-places, in all our day's driving we did not pass ten men. Can two walk together, said the prophet of Tekoah, except they be agreed? Amos would have understood Manitoba.

A mile and three-quarters south now brought us to our starting-place. The horse was tired, but went gaily to the end. Supper was awaiting us, and we had rare appetites for it. My host dithered again with his chores, with firewood, and with water from the well. When the Gibeonites were set aside to be hewers of wood

and drawers of water they were condemned to do the chores for ever. The villagers assembled for evensong, proudly because of the new gas-generating oil-lamps, lit for the first time to-night. And the church, which in any European land would have seemed small and poky, after the places of our earlier worship seemed nothing less than a cathedral.

A motor car had been ordered to take us in the morning to the railway station. It was ordered early. The people in these parts have no sense of time. And the whistle of the railway engine could be heard before we saw anything of our car. But we raced the train to the station and came sleepily to Winnipeg and to the work of the week.

UNUSUAL WEATHER

IF by chance I had told my neighbours that in spare Saturday mornings at home and stray moments on the street car I was engaged in composing a slim volume to be called *The First Winter*, they would almost certainly have bade me desist or find another title. In so far as low depths below zero were concerned, the first winter turned out to be an absolute frost. Our coldest weather of all was in November, and that little more than twenty degrees below zero. When we read of snowstorms in London and fierce weather in the Channel, it was thawing and balmy in Winnipeg. When men had wearied of asking us whether we had settled in yet and how we were managing the furnace, when we had exhausted every possible comment, good or bad in accordance with our mood, in reply to the query: 'What do you think of Canada?' then they began the next great question: 'Well, isn't it a wonderful winter?' Of course, they explained, we were feeling the cold less than anybody. The first

winter you don't feel it all. After that your blood gets thin. Yet agriculturists were sighing for snow to water the land, citizens sighed for snow to cover up the dirty mess in the streets, but there was no snow forthcoming. Old Timers raved about the frozen noses and frost-bitten ears of yesterday, but our noses and ears came triumphantly through the winter unscathed. The hard ice of the streets was lined with runnels of water, like the sands of a shore where the tide retreats far from the land. When prompted by the offer of a Poplar Special and a general inclination to try every wood once, I had laid in a cord of poplar logs, a snow-drift in the back garden suddenly disappeared and I prised from the frozen earth below thirty or more good logs of birch. There were days in February when it would not have been at all inappropriate to have quoted Wordsworth's *Lines Written in March*. Yet all the while men murmured: 'Just you wait. It's coming, sure enough. One of these mornings, when you least expect it, you'll get caught.' For the mind of a Manitoban reacts to thaw exactly as does the mind of an Englishman to frost. It can't last. It's sure to break. 'Yet I've lived in this country thirty-nine years,' said one man to me, 'and the weather's never been

anything except unusual.' At the end of February, when they should have been wondering if ever they would see the grass again, women began to dream of summer fashions and men found it unsafe to cross the river. Grass there was a-plenty, though it was soggy and dull in colour as snow. All over the world, from Spitzbergen to Cape Horn, the winters are never what they were.

Yet none the less the winter had its moments. Thaws were followed by frosts. Children skated in the streets and citizens came a cropper on the sidewalks. The frost held sufficiently for the annual bonspiel to be a success. Curlers burred of in-turns and strong men carried brooms in the main thoroughfares of the city. Men had longed for six weeks or more for fresh snow to cover all the dirt and mess and ice, longed for it as a man who has been in camp overlong desires a change of clothing. Then at length it came. At first it came thinly; then on the second day it fell more thickly; it was damper too. I had to beat my pathway once again across the vacant lot. The city streets were horrible with slush, to ride in a motor car was to know all the thrills of the roller coaster. In suburban streets where ice was lurking, no man knew where to put

his feet, and few reached home after the long day's work without at least one encounter with the ground. Yet the land itself was fresh and lovely. And two friends decided that it was about time for them to quit the city for a few brief hours and see how the country was looking.

At a certain hour and at a certain place we arranged that we should meet and board a tram. At least I would be on the tram already, journeying from the remote districts beyond the subway. If my friend were there in good time he would look out for me and hop on to the car to join me. By this careful foresight we should save precisely twopence-halfpenny. Alas, for the best-laid schemes of mice and men! I arrived at the corner too early. It was a very windy corner. The men beside me remarked that the weather was not really cold; there was a semblance of chill in the air because of the sultry days from which we had emerged. My friend came hurrying down the road and we just missed another car. But a few minutes later we were jogging south from the city into open lands new blanketed with snow and with a sight of the wide Red River.

The first thing we saw upon arriving at the line's terminus was a poster outside the local hotel:

CHICKEN DINNER EACH DAY BY RESERVATION.

That seemed right. We went in and made our reservations. This was an old French settlement to which we had come. Over across the river, so they told me, was Louis Riel's farm. Scattered around the place were the remnants of the Métis families—the French half-breeds—that had lent to him such menacing support, that indeed had threatened the whole future of the West. The French hotel proprietor took our request quite calmly. 'Chicken dinner? Certainly. At one o'clock? Sure!' and directed us on our way. A signpost also said: TO TRAPPIST MONASTERY, so we felt that we could not well go wrong. Yet in the end we lost our way.

A Métis woman came to the door of the wooden cottage at which we had knocked and directed us back over the sleepers of the railway line, in the direction from which we had come. Yet after a while we plunged into the woods. This was the right path at last. And as I walked I seemed to understand all that Canadian artists had ever painted of snow and the long blue shadows of trees. I understood Mr. W. H. Davies's reference to Frost's 'plump young sister Snow.' 'People complain that the snow makes the country dreadfully monotonous in winter,' said my friend, trudging ahead of me

along the narrow path, 'but the truth is that it would be much more monotonous without it.' Soon we came to a narrow river, a tributary of the Red. A rickety wooden suspension bridge spanned it at a height that was remarkable in this flat land of plains. The effect was almost that of a gorge. Upon the unsullied snow of the river's frozen surface the poplar trees that lined its banks cast thin parallel blue shadows closely set together, like the warp upon a loom set ready for the crossing woof. It was a sight quite unexpected, the loveliest I had seen since landing at Quebec.

Beyond the river lay the monastery, a group of buildings in wood and stone placed surely on foundations in the New World, yet ever haunted by dreams of an old. We rang the porter's bell. A bearded brother in a brown habit, who bore a striking resemblance in face and dress to the conventional portraits of St. Francis, told us that unfortunately he could not show us round just then. He was very sorry, but it was quite impossible. We must come back at three o'clock. So we returned to our chicken dinner.

The chicken dinner is one of Canada's great institutions. It is the country's fatted calf. It symbolizes high days and holidays, birthdays,

prodigals' returns, beanos at the beach, charitable entertainments, and May the Twenty-fourth. Hardly a parish in the country emerges from the autumn without the opportunity of at least one Fall fowl supper. The exiled Canadian stranded in the Sahara or miserable in Mayfair probably dreams of chicken dinner. On desolate highways and deserted roads the traveller is often heartened by a poster drawing attention to Smith, Brown, or Robinson's Chicken Dinner. Even at a university examination in French, at which I was once required to invigilate, where an essay question was set on 'Si l'on vous donnerait \$200 et une semaine pour les depenser, qu'est-ce que vous feriez?' though some young ladies declared that they would go off to Minneapolis and buy hats, and others that they would stay in Winnipeg and buy stockings, one, more bold, more generous than the rest, proposed to commence operations by entertaining her whole family to a chicken dinner at that very hostelry which we were now approaching. And we were approaching hungrily.

The browned chicken, hewn into its several limbs, was set before us and we did our duty well. Then our good French host brought us fritters and maple sugar in large quantities.

Then he brought us our bill and we had sudden reason to doubt his goodness. It was a sum to dream about, that would have given us six courses in the West End of London, that would have served us a week at a place I know in Soho. Sadder men and wiser, though with our inner longings satisfied, we put out on the trail again. Our morbid occupation was to compute how many chickens a man might buy for the price of one chicken dinner.

Ever since I read *Travels with a Donkey* there has always been a Trappist monastery in the land of my imagination. It is one of the great extremities, the poles of human life. And yet as soon as we stepped within the lodge we heard the ringing of a telephone-bell. It was a thing to have lived to hear; it was as if one had come across a grove of date palms in Antarctica. The bearded brother said we must excuse him for a moment. On the table, obviously exposed for sale, was Trappist honey and Trappist cheese. We did not inquire the price. After our recent experience we did not dare. In a glass cupboard were the books and beads of piety; on the walls were pictures of other monasteries of the same Order. I gained prestige with our guide when I told him that I had seen the outside of one of them.

And when we told him that we were from England he remarked that of course they'd founded Oxford University. For the Trappists, after all, were Cistercians (I tried to butt in here with my schoolroom knowledge of Stephen Harding), and the Cistercians were Benedictines reformed. Indeed, all English architecture was of monastic inspiration. He made it seem but yesterday that Oxford was a Studium Generale recognized by the Pope. But my companion was a Rhodes Scholar and he did not seem to take very kindly to all this information.

In the open space beyond, the brown brothers, who seemed rather clad in sacking than in clothes, were busy sawing poplar wood with a machine. We entered an engineering shop, and heard of the great area of land for whose cultivation the monastery was responsible. And at the same time we heard of the guest-house to which any one could come who so desired. Tired business men who wanted a little peace and quiet after the rush and turmoil of Winnipeg, the shouting days in the Grain Exchange, came there often. As we entered the main buildings we were bidden be silent. We stood for a moment in the chapel, where a monk or two were at their

prayers; we glanced at the breviaries (alas, they were printed ones) and were shown an elaborate hanging lamp made by craftsmen in the monastery itself; we trod a wooden cloister, then said good-bye to our guide, stepping out once more from the old world to the new.

A brisk wind had arisen while we were within the monastery. We reached the river, and, as we trod its banks, it seemed very much the river that we had walked upon by night at Christmas-time. It was a highway once again; a couple of cutters passed us and a bobsleigh laden with ice. In the strength of our chicken dinner we went many miles. We slipped in and out of snowdrifts; snow lodged itself between my shoes and my overshoes; I longed for my snowshoes and my outfit. As we came nearer to the city we came upon a motor car seeking again and again to climb the river's bank, like a salmon trying to leap an over-high fall or a moth bombarding a window-pane. The driver called out to us, we pushed behind, and the car mounted the hill.

It seemed, however, that the season was changing. Surely there were more birds in the air? And within a very few days the snow was gone. But there followed frost, frost reminiscent of November, so that waiting for

a street car was again a penance for the ears. A week after our walk south the prairie between Winnipeg and Selkirk was like a sea of milk. Amongst the steamers in the inlet at Selkirk the ice had somehow piled itself high, in blocks, like the pictures of the Giant's Causeway, upon which nimble-footed children could have played a glorious game of follow-my-leader. But no such children did we see. Only in the distance, by an island in the river, the skaters were swirling and darting, lithe as ballet dancers and aery as birds. In the café at Selkirk the Chinese proprietor was still serving apple-pie and coffee to half-breeds and Scandinavians, an atrocious musical instrument, radio or gramophone, I do not know which, crooned negro songs and tunes, the newsboys waited about for the afternoon's papers from Winnipeg, and a man with nothing else to do gambled for nickels at an automatic game. Down at the river, however, the ice-cutters had ceased their work. Perhaps they had cut all the ice they wanted. Perhaps every one was sick of fish. Nor did it look very appetizing as it flapped behind the houses like washing on a line. Yet we bought a frozen white fish at the fish market and took it home. I was afraid it might melt on the street car, but

it stayed as hard as wood. Yet a few days later it was very good to eat.

The thaws came again and sunny days. Still we wore overshoes, big black things that seemed to double the size of our feet, but we wore them as a protection from the mud rather than from the snow. The snow was gone. The pleasant parks of summer, where, by the season's miracle, lobelias and geraniums were yet to grow, were sullen pools. The grass looked as if it was impossible for it ever to be green again. Yet a neighbour of mine told me that his tulips were coming along nicely. They'd been showing green since February. We walked in the mud towards the river and suddenly saw that the ice was disappearing. This was to have been the grand climax of this book. I had planned it in November, I had pondered it in January. For pictures of the ice's going out had been painted for me frequently in the vivid language of my friends. Sometimes whole houses were carried away. Barns and haystacks would come sweeping round the bend. Here and there would be furniture, scraps of kitchen chairs and disjointed Chesterfields that told their own sad story. Sometimes live stock would be seen far out in midstream. And all the time there

would resound the crunch, crunch of the ice, a sound that no man who has heard it is ever likely to forget, a sound to haunt man's dreams. . . . It was to have been a noble piece of fine writing, a glorious purple patch. I was to have added, 'The first winter was over,' and written on my page, 'The End.'

Nothing like was happening. There was little drama in the scene. Only the wide flat rafts of ice, discoloured by the winter's traffic, drifted slowly by, and nudged each other now and then, and moved on to pile themselves up towards the lake.

On 1st April there came the first shower of rain. It seemed a sweet, civilized thing that spoke of English streets, and picnics, and cricket, and walks on hills. Only I remembered the date and did not take its promise very seriously. The points of the compass play a great part in a Canadian's life, and on 2nd April the postman told me that it would turn colder; the wind was from the north. The next day was Good Friday, upon the afternoon of which early training had taught me that I might with propriety plant potatoes. I did not take the risk. In the evening I looked up to see that snow had emphasized the outline of the variegated asbestos tiles upon

the little house across the way. The snow was thin but very cold. The furnace of my house was out—I might have to light it again—but I saw to it that my wood fire blazed.

On Easter Day the snow was still upon the ground, though we had daffodils in the drawing-room. Easter Monday is not a public holiday here—they manage these things very differently in Canada—but it was not a day on which a newly imported Englishman could settle down to very rigorous work. I was glad when friends came for us in a motor car and took us the sixty miles to Winnipeg Beach, where they were going to examine summer cottages. The prairie was all in flood, our road seemed often a miraculous viaduct, for it was well constructed and dry, the Government highway. We passed the shields that inculcate careful driving. I pointed out the little house where I had once had dinner. The day was bright and warm. There was a whisper of spring in the sloughs. The pussy willow was in bloom, the slough willow shone red, there were birds that sang. At the beach the giant switchback was still unused—deserted on Easter Monday—but a loud-speaker from a garage hinted of horrors that were to be. At last we picnicked beside the lake. Near us a great snowdrift,

with crackling sound, was wilting in the sun. And all the lake was ice, mile after mile of white as far as eye could see. We walked on it. We discussed how high the water would come in summer-time. We watched a dog-team go by with fishermen, upon the frozen surface. Motor cars still were crossing it, they said, but soon it would grow risky. And, marvelling, we picnicked by its shore, peeling oranges and exchanging sandwiches. We basked in summer sun. Arctic winter still was only a stone's throw away.

BOYHOOD'S REALIZATION

To our eyes it seemed that there could be no such thing in Manitoba as the spring. Only the days would alternate like a see-saw, from winter to summer, from summer back to winter suddenly again. One day I worked in shirt-sleeves, the next I went out in an overcoat; and so for a very long season it continued. We threatened each other with penalties should we lapse into quoting Browning's *Home Thoughts from Abroad*. But it was at the back of both of our minds. For it is at the turning of the seasons that a man thinks most of his home. Yet down by the river, as the dark ice drifted past, the first weeds were showing green. And very soon friends brought to us, or left in brown paper-bags upon our doorstep,¹ bunches of short-stemmed prairie crocuses, the pale mauve anemones that perform the function of the lesser celandine throughout the Canadian West. Then a man called to take the storm windows off our house, and it seemed that blinkers had fallen from our eyes.

¹ Please accept this, the only acknowledgment.

A week after Christmas it had been my lot to travel north into the country between the Lakes to bring the services of the Church to the scattered members of an outlying parish. Once again, a week after Easter, I journeyed north into the same country for a similar purpose. Only this time I did not travel so far. This time also I was to stay with a fellow-parson, the only ordained Anglican, with the exception of a missionary to the Indians, in that scattered bush country. Once again I found my way to the little suburban station. Only this time I decided that the season for my heaviest coat was past, that my Old Timer's cap had better stay where it was, in the cupboard with the moth balls. Once again I found the school teachers, returning from their short holiday in the city, on the crowded train, chatting, laughing, strolling about together. Six faces I recognized that were on the train before. Only one I missed, the youngest, the gayest of them all. Perhaps she was not going to return that way again. Perhaps the task of discipline there in the north had proved too stiff. Perhaps she had been wily and secured an extra day's holiday in the city. Perhaps she had gone and got married. I did not know. But otherwise there they all were again, and

once more we deposited them up and down the line.

This time I did not travel alone. A friend was going an hour's journey north of me, a second friend an hour's journey to the south. When I got up on Monday morning I should at least have the satisfaction of knowing that at that very moment friend number one was making a dash for the train; when I made a dash for the train myself I should be disgruntled to think that friend number two was just settling down to porridge and bacon. Which is relativity. This second friend was a Manitoban born and bred, a farmer's son, one with a sensitive eye for the changing lights that make glorious the prairie, who knew its soils and its history, its fauna and its flora as well, who had also an apt way of drawing a rather lengthy bow for the benefit of the inquisitive newcomer. 'Why don't they keep sheep up this way?' I asked. 'Because of the wolves,' he grimly replied, and began to tell tales of coyotes and of skunks, to deplore the rapacious ways of gophers, and the spreading roots of the sow-thistle which, said he, nothing will eat except a very hungry rabbit. (Next summer, when I began to cultivate my vegetable garden, I came to wish that my neighbour kept rabbits

instead of useless pigeons, and that he let them get very hungry indeed.) Water stood upon the prairie, but there were drifts of snow at the windbreaks. I fancied that my friend of the thirty-mile drive would still have a pretty substantial hill in front of his house. But my companion pointed out from the window the flicker of French weed on the land, the first green thing in spring. Indeed, with his eyes, I saw far more than I had seen on my journey north before. Perhaps there was more to be seen. Flocks of snowbirds darted about, gay in their white plumage that already bore a touch of summer's brown. A great white owl came to rest in a field. Prairie chickens rose from the poplar bush and killdeers darted about the sloughs. These were the birds that I had seen by the lake in autumn, that had reminded me of curlews.

My host had promised to meet me at the station. But when the train drew up beside the main street of the little town I did not see him. My eyes and those of my companion, who had yet an hour's journey before him, scanned the horizon and the street. Then suddenly from a side street—or rather a gap between two houses—there came a running figure. He said he always waited till he heard

the train before he began to move. It kept him in training.

He had told me in his letter, and now as we entered his little house he told me again, that of course he was 'baching' ¹ and so I mustn't expect too much. There are some men who ought never to be allowed to 'bach.' They wander pitiably around, bringing one thing on to the table and then the next, never remembering that a tray saves time, getting up and walking about the house in the middle of supper, letting breakfast go hang, forgetting to make their beds, and leaving their washing-up sometimes for three or four days, sometimes for a month. Their socks are invariably in holes. There are others who do the thing efficiently, but with a sense of duty; they loathe the tins and trays of housekeeping, and eventually they find refuge in matrimony. There are others who revel in it all, at least for a time, who treat it as the latest, most enjoyable game, who know all the tricks and dodges. They have half a dozen ways of telling whether a boiled egg is sufficiently cooked, and as many to discover whether it is new-laid, or fresh, or worse. To this last class belonged my host. He was a prince of bachelors. He

¹ The derivative is from 'bachelor,' not 'Bach.'

explained that of course he took one meal every day at the hotel (just as there are vegetarians who allow themselves to eat fish), and that some experiments he had made with cakes and buns had not achieved the success for which he had hoped. But everything in the house was ship-shape. He brought in wood from his stack behind for his cooking-stove and a bucket of coal for the stove in the front room. By a careful banking of coal and wood this could be made to last the night, even in extreme weather. You wouldn't catch him getting up at two o'clock in the morning to tend the fire. Supper soon was ready, and it was a meal sufficient to satisfy the most hardened of married men. Then we washed up, or, in the Canadian phrase, 'did the dishes,' pouring our hot water from the kettle through a pierced tin in which were fragments of soap. That was the sort of trick I used to read about in the *Boy's Own Paper*. It was a symbol of glad efficiency.

This place also had a bank and a creamery, so was entitled to the proud name of town. Indeed it was slightly more of a town than that which I had visited at Christmas. You would not notice it at first, perhaps, for both were little more than clearings in the bush, but there

was something a trifle different in the attitude of the inhabitants. Perhaps it was the extra store that did it. Perhaps it was the two hotels. Perhaps it was the hospital. One man whom we met, a man of no small substance in the town, told me that he hadn't been in Winnipeg for two years. There was no regret or surprise in his voice. It just so happened that he had not been that way.

Dark clouds blew up from the west as we strolled down the street towards the church, and the sun had set in the bush. It was a small wooden church, a little unsteady on its foundations, but sensibly planned. One day they hoped to move it on to the vacant lot next door. Not this year, however; they must wait. A special Easter appeal was resulting in fresh fencing for the glebe, and soon they hoped to paint the outside of the building. The rector and churchwarden expected to do most of the work themselves, but there would be other helpers. When he was last in the city the rector had mentioned to the archbishop of the province that one day they hoped to repaint the church, only that the more urgent job was fencing. His Grace replied that sometimes he helped with paint for churches, provided that the work of painting

was all voluntarily done. The rector must send him his church's dimensions as soon as he returned. This he did. The archbishop wrote back to ask whether allowance had been made for two coats or for one. The rector, who was indeed only a newly-ordained deacon, had not dared to think of more than one coat, only he added boldly that they expected to put it on pretty thickly. His Grace replied that in his experience one coat always blistered; he recommended two coats, the second to be thinned down with oil. The paint and the oil came down on a later train. And there it was, in two wooden boxes in the vestry. The story seemed a delightful illustration of archiepiscopal functions in a pioneer land.

The real motorist, I remember once being told, is not he who owns the most expensive car nor goes the fastest speed, but he who buys a broken wreck and makes it go. To this last class my bachelor friend belonged. His car was known up and down the country-side. There was no such car for bumping. There was no such car for getting its inwards red hot. But it always arrived. Soon in the morning we were bumping off to service in a school-house eight miles east of town. But just as we turned out of the main street I saw a bird

that I had never seen before. It was the size and shape of a thrush, but it had a brick-red breast. 'Whatever 's that?' I said. 'Oh, just a robin,' I was told. But it was unlike any robin that I had ever seen before. The very birds and fruits of this land are affected by the country's megalomania. Even our words are as long as we can possibly make them. Where English people have a hall, Canadians have an auditorium; where English people go in for mixed farming, Canadians go in for diversified farming; while English streets have corners, Canadian streets know only intersections; where English people attend a service, there is always a fear that Canadians may be attending devotional exercises or even listening to an inspirational address. And just as sometimes beside maps of Canada they print diminutive maps of Great Britain 'on the same scale,' so by every illustration of a Canadian robin or a Canadian tomato or a Canadian rabbit there should be set a smaller representation of a British robin or tomato or rabbit 'on the same scale.'

We bumped along the narrow bush road, and very fortunately our car proved too light ever to get stuck in the mud. The road had only been open for motor cars for a week; the Sunday earlier the rector had made the

maiden trip of the season. No heavier car could have gone that way. And even now there was one spot ahead that he anticipated with fear. Stones had been placed in it times without number, but it sucked them all up and covered them with mud. The path-master later told me of the great number of stones that had been placed there in his time, and I have no doubt that he spoke the truth, for stones in that part of the country are commoner than potatoes in a potato field. Great piles of them stand in the middle of fields, piles that represent years of family toil, and yet the fields themselves appear no less filled with stones, all of the size of a football and upwards. They seem to put severely to the test the divine promise that 'while the earth remaineth, seed time nor harvest shall not fail.' We came to the treacherous place on the road. We dipped, we swerved, we skidded; for a moment it seemed that we were likely to stick. Like Christian's companions in the Slough we 'wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed with dirt,' but from the car's wallowings there emerged a purpose; suddenly we were on the other side and bumping on into the bush.

Partridges rose from the poplar and jack pine, hawks hovered above a marsh. Then we

turned a corner and again I called out: 'What 's that?' A tall, lovely animal stood on the road ahead. It quickly crossed it, and leaping the ditch, went darting into the bush, its white tail like a rabbit's gaily leaping behind. I do not think my companion in the car quite understood my exultation. He had seen jumping deer before, though not, he said, on this road, nor in this part of the country. But for me this was a sudden vision of

what my heart first awaking,
Whispered the world was.

I felt a sudden rush of freedom. I was done with zoological gardens and museums and deer parks; at last I had come near to wild life itself. I had come to a place to which all my life I had been journeying. R. M. Ballantyne was in the background, *The Young Fur-Traders* and *Ungava; Adrift in the Pacific, or the Strange Adventures of a Schoolboy Crew*, this also had its sudden fruition. Birds'-nesting as a boy and adventures with catapults, tours on the Continent, and a man with a double-barrelled gun near Thionville who said that he was off to shoot boars, nights on the sea and early mornings with a fishing-rod, all these acquired a sudden purpose, a reality. And I understood more

clearly than I had ever done before why I had come to live in Canada. It was the odd consequence of a schoolboy's dreams.

The stones in the fields had proved too much for many settlers. We passed an empty house beside the way, a big substantial house it was, too. Once it had possessed good window-frames, but they had been the first to go. Next the doors had gone, but that was still a long while ago. Then suddenly, last week, the hardwood floors had disappeared, and everybody in the district walked with downcast eyes when he entered a neighbour's house. It would not be long, said the rector, before the whole thing went up in flames. A slough fire—and there were many burning—was sure to catch it one of these days.

In the school-house, beneath the stencilled rabbits on the blackboard, with Union Jack as frontal, we set up our altar. Then, when the service was over, we were welcomed into a whitewashed farm for dinner.

An unpractised English eye might have imagined that the house was built of stone. But it was a genuine log cabin, far more spacious within than it had given promise of being from without. And as we sat at dinner the story of its building was told.

The farmer had come out from England. At first he had done various odd jobs—odd jobs were plentiful in those days—then came the war, and back he went to Europe. Wounded, he sought to be put in hospital in his native Lancashire, but did not succeed. They kept him down south. Then he returned to Canada. For a while he was homesteading a few miles farther south upon the line. Homesteading, I was later told, meant 'squatting on a hundred and sixty acres of land that the Government present to you on a wager. They bet you a hundred and sixty acres of land to ten dollars that you can't stick it for three years.' He had stuck it for three years and secured his land, but he had moved before very long. The situation was awkward, the neighbours were a nuisance, and he determined to obtain fresh land. He bought his present land, paying about as much for each acre, he complained, as the whole would fetch to-day. He had built the house himself, with no outside help, from the timber on the lot. He had taken up the harvest at the homestead, then journeyed the seven or eight miles north, and built the house, and they were in it for the winter. The whitewash had been made from stones about the place. That was one good

thing about the stones: they could be turned into a lasting whitewash. The whole final move had been made in one day. Indeed, his wife reminded him, she had cooked the breakfast on the stove in one house and cooked the supper on the same stove in the other. Father and daughter went ahead with the teams, whilst the wife drew up the cavalcade, driving the stock.

Conversation drifted naturally to the hard times, and the low prices to be got for milk, the absurdity of bothering to sell eggs except to private customers in Winnipeg who paid the retail price. But a note of optimism ran through the conversation. The farmer's wife was convinced that there was a good time coming. I have never heard anybody defend the country between the Lakes, with its stones, its muskeg, and its bush, except some of the people who live there. Meanwhile, of course, she said they were rather marking time. But soon the note for advance would sound again. 'And,' she added, 'there isn't anything on this table, except the salt and pepper, that the farm itself could not supply.' I glanced around, and it was true. The chicken, the honey, the butter, the fruit, all were from the farm. She explained that, as it happened, the cakes and

bread were not made from their own flour, but they had been in the past, and they could easily be again. Why, there was an Icelandic family not very far distant where the mother ran a spinning-wheel.

I have heard a story told by a city lawyer. He was called into the country to investigate the affairs of a farmer who was in the bankruptcy court. As he approached the farm he could see no signs of poverty. There was machinery and equipment in plenty. Still less did he feel the biting sense of want as he sat down with the family to a dinner of turkey. But he caught a hint that all was not well when the farmer said with a weary sigh: 'Hard times wouldn't be so bad if you didn't have to eat chicken every day.'

When dinner was over we had swiftly to be away, but first we saw our hostess in a little hut surrounded by five hundred little chickens, only one of which was ailing. She seemed supremely happy. And as we bumped along the road the stone heaps had acquired for me a new significance. They were a test, a test of man's endurance. Such as endured the trial of the stone heaps and the ordeal by muskeg were permitted to remain in the land. They were hardened, but they had acquired a poise.

The land they knew was theirs. Most of us live in houses that other hands have made. Our furniture, our carpets, our drains, our fire-places and our stairways, our hardwood floors, we have had nothing to do with their making and little enough to do with their design. We are not indeed so much house-dwellers as lodgers in other men's property, the confused product of other men's brains. For our meals we harness half the globe, instead of doing that more primitive thing of harnessing ourselves. Our servants and our slaves are infinite. The world does homage at our door. My host at dinner was in a different position; he knew that he was dwelling in his own house, his wife knew that it was her own dinner she was giving me. I envied them the feeling.

The following Sunday our service of even-song from the cathedral was to be broadcast over the radio. I was to be in some part responsible for it. Before we left, the farmer's wife besought me to speak clearly. Their battery needed recharging, and she couldn't afford to have it done just then.

And on the way back we saw another jumping deer.

THE SECOND WINTER

AT last there came a day when I stood again beside the lake. And as I looked out across the water—I had almost said, as I looked out to sea—I fancied that I saw white cliffs in the distance, like the white cliffs of Dover. For an hour as I watched we seemed to be drawing nearer to them. Soon we would land, I felt, and take the night train to London. It would be good to see the place again, to order dinner in a wonted restaurant, to surprise friends upon the telephone, to walk in the streets. We drew nearer still. Then darkness fell and the Northern Lights spread out across the sky. In the morning the wind had changed. The cliffs no more were visible. The ice had been blown another way.

Surely now summer had come. Surely the approach of the ice cliffs, the gay pageant of the Northern Lights, not white only but tinged with red and green, made winter's elegy. Now at last we were in for a change. Butterflies flitted from the woodlands, robins sang in the

gardens, and sea-gulls hovered above the river. The thermometer mounted above eighty degrees. I was glad that I had planted my seeds in the garden; Old Timers shook their heads and said that it was rather early, but I had acquired the gambling spirit of the West and taken the risk. We drove back through the hot day to the city, and once or twice we stayed our speed because of the thick smoke of bush fires. All that country had been ruined by fire, my driver said. Thirty years ago it was a different sight. Those who had surveyed the railway line had encountered almost impenetrable bush. And as we reached the city it seemed that every one was leaving it. There was a traffic jam outside Kildonan Park. A close-packed line of cars moved steadily out of the city, like some vast marshalled army setting out to capture the Northlands. Young ladies in flamboyant flapping trousers lined the sidewalks. The miniature golf courses, even, secured some patrons, and there were canoes upon the river. The static winter was over: mobile summer was begun.

The next morning, however, it did not seem so warm, and before morning was out it had begun to snow. It snowed all that day and all that night and all the next day too. The wind

had changed and the thermometer had fallen fifty degrees. An observant man might almost have caught it on the move. I trembled for my beans. 'After all danger of frost is past,' said the packets, and when, pray, would that be? August, perhaps, but the approaching frosts of autumn would then be a danger. Horticulture seemed an impossibility in the land. Robins twittered helplessly, hopelessly, complaining to each other that their grand commander was a pretty hopeless mutt to get them caught like that when they might still be warm and happy in the Southern States. Why hadn't they waited another fortnight? After all, it was only 5th May.

It so happened that I was due that day to travel out again to the lake. It happened also that I was to be driven out by a friend of mine who was to borrow his father's car for the occasion. The telephone-bell rang, and it was a dispiriting voice at the other end. His father had said the car was not to go. Men at business that morning had told hair-raising tales of cars held up on the highways or left abandoned in the ditches. He was not a bit sure that the road would be open at all. The bus company, however, informed us that the snow had not interfered with their time-table. I decided

that it would be wiser, after all, not to pack shorts, and I left my bathing-suit at home.

Winnipeg certainly felt that the whole affair was a mistake. 'Just you wait,' it had been saying to us all through the winter, but few had expected to wait so long as this. They were chilly conversations in the street car. They were damp feet on the roads. And when we clambered into the motor bus for our sixty-mile ride, it seemed that the whole business was starting all over again. Again we were setting off into the unknown—that yesterday was the known; into cold, damp lands that yesterday were plagued with spreading fires. Only as I opened the newspaper did I detect a note of optimism. SUMMER IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER declared the publicity agents of a store, following up the glad news with advertisements of Specials of such articles as bathing-dresses and veranda furniture. I only wondered how it was that I had come out without my heavy overcoat and my Old Timer's cap.

Yet this was not the end.

'Because it is SMART,

COOL,

TUBBABLE,

The World of Fashion is sponsoring

THE FROCK OF COTTON

this season,

And Achieving

Enormous Chic thereby.'

Those may not be the exact words, though the lilt of the sentence ran in my head for weeks, and it was months before I lost the actual cutting. Yet I am certain of 'tubbable,' certain also of 'sponsoring'—which ranks next to 'convene' as the great Canadian word. And I am certain also that this advertisement, or one very like it, appeared on the back page of our morning paper on 17th May. Nor could the advertisers very well be blamed. Hot days had succeeded the snow, birds and flowers had multiplied, the lilac was in bud. We had taken a drive beside the smiling river, blue and fair as a lake, and ventured into a tea-garden for refreshments. The first steamer had passed beneath the bridge. Nevertheless, of another thing I am certain, that on 17th May it snowed all day. I think it snowed all the night too. There was still snow upon the ground on the morning of the 21st.

Nevertheless, my beans did very well indeed.

POSTSCRIPT

(A year later)

THE CHOKE

THE thaw has come; the air is fresh and warm, motor cars splash in the streets like children at the seaside, an anti-mosquito tag day has been announced, and I have given up bothering about the furnace. Sufficiently remote seems that cold week-end in February and the queer matter of the choke, sufficiently remote perhaps for me to tell the story calmly, without feeling, without calling anybody names, and without reviling too glibly the cold of a Manitoban winter.

I knew of course that it might be very cold, and though I had no prevision of the choke, I suspected that we might get stuck in the snow. Last year I had gone the rounds in a cutter; this year the rector of the widespread parish told me that the road was still open for a car. I doubted it. I doubted his car in particular. And that is one reason why I prevailed upon a friend to accompany me. He

was young and innocent and English; his four months' residence in the Dominion made me feel an Old Timer—for it was my second winter. He wanted to see what the country was like in winter-time; I would show him. He might possibly also know something about the inward parts of motor cars; I knew nothing. On Saturday evening, after supper, we were to be fetched. I pulled out from its rather ineffective moth-bag my ragged fur-lined coat. And I told sensational stories to my friend.

The car arrived in good time, and we were introduced to a young Ukrainian, who had accompanied the rector to the city. And as we went down the road the Ukrainian was telling tales of faster drives in higher-powered cars when he was 'selling insurance' in Saskatchewan. What was he doing now? I asked. Oh, just working on a farm, choring around—an odd step, I thought, from insurance agent to chore boy, though one entirely in the right direction. I could wish that all the insurance agents who ring my front-door bell, all the young men who collect dry-cleaning on commission, all the magazine agents who vamp upon the patriotic string, could thus be guided back to the land. But it later 'transpired' that there was more to the story than he told

me. At least, a rather longer story was going the rounds. He had not only been an insurance agent; he had been a secret service agent too, a spy in the service of the licensing authorities, a revealer of illicit vats, a smeller-out of stills. He had been suspected, he had been accused, perhaps he had even been double-crossed. The Ukrainian community where he dwelt had grown too hot to hold him. So now he was a chore boy in the bush, haunted by memories of a Buick.

But there was no doubt that Jack knew much about cars. The one in which we were driving had often come to pieces in his hands; he knew its every weakness and he patronized its strength. And a word kept recurring in his rapid conversation. I did not pay much attention to it at first. I was to hear it grimly in the end. The only trouble with the car, I gathered, was its choke. The city quickly died away; instead of the cars and the bustle, the towering buildings and the flashing lights, there was only a man driving a cutter and the brilliance of stars in a night of cold. It often seems that nowhere so swiftly as in Western Canada can a man slip from the twentieth century to the simplicity of primitive times. Yet this primitiveness frequently is deceptive; hens may

clutter in the living-room and the same fork serve for meat and for pudding, life may depend wholly upon the height of the poplar pile, yet the shelf of books is often better read than most volumes owned by the talkie-tortured masses of the city; newspapers may arrive late at the clearing in the bush, but their contents are actually discussed; and at night there is usually the radio.

Our car was going well. The poplars rose dark around us, dark as if they were a forest and no mere nondescript bush. Rabbits darted across the road, showing their white fur in the beam of our headlights. They were great giants that would have terrified Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cottontail, large as English hares. I had seen them before, but only in the summer. I had never seen them white.

We reached the town that was our rector's postal address. There was a finely built school, a couple of stores, a few houses, and long lines of corded poplar. That was all. Three miles we had yet to go to his house and to his church.

'I was once coming along this road and a man stopped me. The train had just gone by. "Did I get off at X?" he asked. "Sure," I said. "Then where is it?" he said. "Oh,

you took the wrong turning. It's the other way. That house down there.'''

But just as the rector was finishing his anecdote, the car suddenly stopped. 'It's that choke,' said Jack, and jumped gaily out into the cold.

He did some expert buzzing in the bonnet and the car soon ran again. We were brought to our destination and the glad warmth of a log stove. Then, dread discovery, it was suddenly realized that this was Saturday night and the house was nearly breadless. 'I'd better pop back to town,' said the rector. 'It won't take long.' But Jack was heard to mutter something about the choke.

The evening lengthened out, and the drive had made us drowsy, but still the rector tarried. Jack had given us successive lectures on his own education (with which the rector was aiding him), on all the dances and hockey matches of the neighbourhood, on motor cars in general and a Saskatchewan Buick in particular, but at last he said he guessed he'd better go and see where the rector had got to; you could see a long way down the road from the corner by the farm. He was not long away, and he came back with our host. Loaves he had secured in ample sufficiency, but the choke

had let him down. The car was stranded by the wayside where it had finally succumbed, but a quarter of a mile away. And Jack took from his pocket a part of a carburettor and set it on the stove. 'That 'll thaw it out,' he said. And there it stayed till morning.

Blessings upon Jack, and upon his employer who spared him the time to serve as the rectory mechanic. The car was shipshape in the morning. I was to preach first at a school-house twelve miles away, have dinner, journey another twelve miles to another school-house for afternoon service, and then drive back for evensong in the church. Jack would like to have gone the rounds with us. Unfortunately his master had beasts that must be fed. But he would be there in the evening, singing in the choir. And he gave us a fore-taste of the anthem.

We set off northwards, gladdened by the waved good-byes. The white wideness of the road seemed to lead in either direction to the world's end. After two miles we were to turn west. 'This is where we get stuck,' said the rector. Ever since then I have felt that it was a thing he ought not to have said, it hinted at a snag of scepticism beneath the current of his faith, it confessed openly that only upon

sufferance is a motorist lord of the snows. For we certainly did get stuck. Nor would the car go again. Hoping and daring, like an unprepared schoolboy who thinks he has been granted the godsend of an answer, I suggested that it might be . . . Well, you know what I suggested.

'No, I don't think it's that. Jack fixed the choke all right.'

Yet pushing did nothing—the car would move, but it would not start—fiddling did nothing, and we swung the starting-handle till our arms were aching; suggestions could only be an aggravation.

'No, I'll have to go and get the garage man from the next town. Fortunately it's only a mile away—you can see the elevator over there. I'll be back soon.'

We saw him walk hurriedly away towards the horizon. And my companion in the car pointed out a poster that stood beside the cross-roads. It called attention to TENTING SITES, CAMPING CONVENIENCES, AND PLAYGROUND.

A bobsleigh laden with a family going out for Sunday's social call halted for its driver to ask whether there was anything that he could do for us. We thanked him kindly, but explained that we had called in expert advice.

And then we saw a car come south to us, with the rector and two other men. One settled down to work. He complained that his hand had got frozen the night before, when umpiring a hockey match, but his hand was nevertheless working speedily in the engine. Actually it proved to be a hand-to-mouth affair. It was the warmth of the garage man's saliva that set us on our way. I glanced at my watch. The congregation had been waiting twenty minutes.

We crossed the main provincial highway and continued our journey west. But now the going was more difficult. For there had been a wind in the night, and it is the east-west roads that catch the drifting snow. 'I didn't know it had blown up so much as this,' said the rector. Yet we might have plunged through the drifts had they been drifts alone. The trouble was that someone else had travelled that way the night before and laid a winding trail

such as we did tread

The night we went to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head.

Very soon we were stuck. Then was I glad that I had prevailed upon my Englishman to accompany me. Two men might push the car out of the ruts while the third one held the

wheel. Had I pushed alone I might have been pushing still. Sackcloth is still a part of the travelling priest's equipment, and had there been ashes in the car we would gladly have used them too. With stones and sackcloth and the straw our predecessor had left prodigally behind, we would set a place for the wheels to grip. Then the engine rumbled and we pushed. Four times we were stuck. Four times the sackcloth saved us. It was good preparation for a sermon. But that morning I did not have to preach a sermon. Congregations do not usually wait an hour.

At last we reached the entrance to the churchwarden's farmyard. 'I think we'll just turn in here,' said the rector, 'to see whether they're still at the school-house.' 'Isn't it rather tempting Providence to turn?' we asked. But already we had turned, and already we had got stuck. Half the congregation—to wit, the farmer's sons—appeared from the house, and many hands made light work. The morning's service had been given up. But there was no need to forgo our dinner. Yet I felt a labourer unworthy of his hire.

We sat beside the stove and talked of ordeals by snow and chokes. Suddenly the rector took his collar off and thrust it into the fire. 'That's

the end of that,' he said. For one awful moment I thought that the day's exasperations had caused him suddenly to resign his orders, to become a professor or a politician or a printer. But the explanation was fortunately more simple. It was a composition collar, of a kind made necessary in a land unvisited by laundry vans, but it had not stood the strain of the morning's labours. It had broken at the back. And the fierceness of its blaze caused the churchwarden to indulge in eschatological speculations.

We rose swiftly from our meal, for we had no desire to miss the second service. And I do not think it was anxiety to hear my preaching alone that caused the churchwarden's eldest son to proffer his services as a driver for the remainder of the day. Now we were in the winding ruts again, we saw the scattered straw and the black, shiny places where our wheels had spun so ineffectively, and miraculously we passed them by. Each stormy Horn, each Cape of Good Hope was rounded. Once more on the main road, we made a lengthy detour so as to secure more gasoline. Our way actually took us past the house whence we had set out so gallantly that morning and past Jack's farm. We did not halt for collar or

for choke, we did not even wave. And we arrived in good time at the school-house, though already half a horse show seemed to be tethered without. Nor did the car trouble us on our journey back to supper. But after evensong tenor turned mechanic once again. A small black object was set upon the stove and then returned to the engine of the car.

Morning came. We had planned to be early awake and early away, for both I and my friend had work to be done in the city. Indeed, that was the agreement upon which I had enticed him to brave with me the wintry week-end. Back to Winnipeg by eleven. So, too, our host had promised us.

Morning came, I say. I heard stirrings below, the obvious dropping of fresh logs into the stove. I got up to look out. On Sunday morning I had looked out to see the little church, the wooden belfry, the gravestones almost buried in the snow, the red barn which the unaccommodating vestry insisted should be kept as a barn and not modernized into a garage, the thin, fringing poplar bush. But on Monday morning I saw none of these things. The window was entirely frosted over. My companion, who seemed to regard the weather

as in the nature of a sporting event, had brought with him a thermometer in his rucksack. We opened the window and put the thermometer out. It quickly registered twenty-five degrees below zero.

Downstairs we found the rector hoisting a great pan of snow on to the kitchen stove, to melt soft water for the baby's bath.

'Hallo! I hope you had plenty of blankets. It was thirty-five below last night. Let's go out and look at the car. Better wrap yourself up.'

Thirty-five below—that was my record. I *did* wrap myself up. Indeed I very quickly undid the ribbon at the top of the fur cap and pulled the flaps down over my ears. Now I knew exactly what those flaps were for. Little of my face could have been visible behind my steamy breath. Rime soon formed upon the upturned buttoned collar. And I was very glad that I had never grown a moustache. They look horrid frozen.

We looked at the car. It was as we all expected. The very oil was gelid. And yesterday's sermon-taster had left the electric switch turned on, so that all power was spent from the batteries and we could not start the engine.

Over hot tea we cogitated. Something must be done to melt the car. I had melted many things in my time, but never a second-hand Chevrolet. It was a new problem even for the rector, for although, owing to his intransigent vestry, the car had braved the open throughout December and January, this had been by far the winter's coldest night. We thought at first that we could manage it with flaming logs from the fire. So we snatched brands from the burning and hurried them under the engine. But this was clearly ineffective. There was a little steam, a little sizzling, a suggestion of dripping water, but as quickly as the water melted it froze again. All that Mr. Robert W. Service had said about the Yukon was plainly true of Manitoba.

Our next expedient was to light a fire under the bonnet of the car itself. It seemed a risky thing to do, but we could think of little else. We dug out logs from the snow-covered woodpile, and I split them with the axe. Soon a merry fire was burning, a regular armada beacon that made in the snow beneath the car a round, black hole like the opening of a well. And the flames leapt up within. I felt that there was something amateurish in that blaze, that Jack—alas! now busy at the farm—would

have set about the matter differently, but I bade doubts begone and went busily on splitting the frozen poplar logs whilst the others piled high the fire. For half an hour at least we kept it going, but it had no effect at all. Except that a deal of moisture had dripped from the engine to the hole below, we were where we had started. The motor car would not start.

Once more we sought to call in expert advice.

Off went the rector and the Englishman to Jack's farm to telephone to the garage man three miles away to come in his car and set things right again. I was the only man left about the place, and they were bathing the baby within, so I felt I had better occupy myself with the chores. As the store of fuel indoors had run low I made an assault upon the wood-pile. If you had passed by upon the road you would have seen no wood-pile for me to assault. I went mining in the snow, and when I threw the logs on to the pile they rang with the resonance of metal. There seemed all Canada in that sound—the wood that rang like iron. When my two companions returned I had made a creditable pile beside the house. But our hostess told me that it would hardly last the day.

The garage man they had not been able to secure. But a team of horses was coming from a distant farm to pull the car along the road until for very shame it started. They'd be round in half an hour or so. Meanwhile Mrs. Jones, who had been waiting at the farm for us to give her a lift along the road, had returned home disconsolate.

The rector went out to draw water. He came back to tell us that the pump-handle had broken in his hands, snapped clean across as a result of frost. We settled down again to light refreshments. But in a few moments he came hurrying in again, and there dawned the nearest approach to eagerness I ever saw upon his face. 'You'd better get ready,' he said, 'the car has started up.'

I like to think that it was our fire that did it, that I had not split logs in vain. A few moments later Jack explained it differently, but I am ready to believe that just for this once he was wrong. At the farm we telephoned for the team of horses to be stopped upon their way, and the farmer set off on a sleigh to fetch Mrs. Jones, who might after all still be glad of a lift. Twenty minutes later she clambered in with boxes of butter and eggs. In the small town where we halted for gasoline they

confirmed the rector's judgment of thirty-five degrees below zero. As we reached paved roads we could see how the wind blew the snow swiftly across our track. All the winter it would go on in this way, moving and piling up and moving and piling up again. Half-way through the afternoon we reached our destination.

'Have you ever been to Russia?' asked my companion, as he took his leave, to return to his interrupted duties.

'No.'

'Well, there 's no need for you to go now.'

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